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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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'Cong manifesto has Muslim League stamp'

PM says Cong is hostile towards Sanatan Dharma

NAWADA, 7 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday launched a blistering attack on Opposition Congress, charging that its poll manifesto bore the imprint of Muslim League and utterances of its leaders betrayed hostility towards national integrity and Sanatan Dharma.

Addressing a rally in Nawada district, his second in Bihar in 72 hours, Modi also recounted the 'jungle raj' that prevailed when the state was ruled by Congress-RJD combine, showering praises on his ally Nitish Kumar and ailing BJP colleague Sushil Kumar Modi for turning things around as Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Minister respectively.

"The manifesto that Congress has released bears the imprint of the Muslim League. It has not released a poll manifesto but a declaration of appeasement (tushtikaran patra)," alleged Modi. The Prime Minister also came down heavily on AICC president Mallikarjun Kharge, without mentioning him by name, who recently objected to raising the issue of abrogation of Article 370, by BJP leaders, during poll campaigns in states like Rajasthan.

He pointed out that security personnel from all over the country, including Rajasthan and Bihar, have laid down their lives fighting terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir, and "their bodies have reached their native places wrapped in tricolour".

"INDIA bloc talks a lot about the Constitution. Their leaders should tell the people why they could not implement the Samvidhan of Baba Saheb Ambedkar fully in Jammu and Kashmir?" asked Modi.

In an apparent reference to controversial remarks of Karnataka MP DK Suresh, the PM said, "You can understand Congress' mindset from the statement of one of its very senior leaders who openly called for making south India a separate nation." Modi, who was in the Bihar district to campaign for BJP candidate Vivek Thakur, said, "I wonder what hostility the Congress has towards popular sentiments. Its leaders did not turn up at pran pratishtha even though the temple at Ayodhya was constructed with donations made by the common people, not with government funds." —*PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a roadshow ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Jabalpur, on Sunday **PHOTO: PTI**

'Unemployment by BJP biggest issue'

Kharge says unemployment under BJP has tripled

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge on Sunday said the biggest issue in Lok Sabha elections is the unemployment "imposed by BJP", claiming the youth are struggling to find jobs and the country is staring at a "demographic nightmare".

In a post on X, Kharge said Congress 'Pehli Naukri Pakki' guarantee under 'Yuva Nyay' would remove the barriers that separate work and learning, thereby opening fresh avenues for career growth.

"The biggest issue in these Lok Sabha elections is unemployment, imposed by the BJP. Our Youth are struggling to find jobs, and we are staring at a demographic nightmare," the Congress president claimed.

Citing the case of India's premier institutes, IITs and IIMs, Kharge said across 12 IITs, around 30 per cent of our students are not getting regular placements. "Only 20 per cent of 21 IIMs could complete the summer placements so far. If this is the situation in IITs and IIMs, then one can imagine how BJP has destroyed the future of our Youth across the country," he said.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge speaks during a public meeting, ahead of Lok Sabha elections, in Jaipur **PHOTO: PTI**

The rate of youth unemployment under Modi government has tripled since 2014, he said. "The ILO's recent India Employment Report showed that each year, India adds around 70-80 lakh youths to the labour force, but between 2012 and 2019, there was almost ZERO growth in employment - just 0.01 per cent!" Kharge said in his post on X.

"'Modi Ki Guarantee about providing 2 crore jobs reverberates as a bad dream in the hearts and minds of our Youth!" he said. Therefore, Congress has brought in 'Pehli Naukri Pakki' guarantee under 'Yuva Nyay', he said.

Any diploma or degree holder below the age of 25, will now have a legal right to demand employment and shall be paid at least Rs 1 lakh a year, Kharge said.

Congress on Friday released its Lok Sabha poll manifesto, focusing on five "pillars of justice" and 25 guarantees under those, at the Congress headquarters here in the presence of Kharge and former party chiefs Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

INDIA will give statehood to Puducherry: Stalin

PUDUCHERRY, 7 APRIL

DMK President and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin on Sunday said that the INDIA bloc, if voted to power after Lok Sabha polls, will provide statehood to Puducherry. Addressing an election rally here seeking support for Congress candidate and present MP V Vaithilingam, he said DMK. Puducherry Chief Minister N Rangasamy is a "puppet in the hands of the Centre," Stalin said and added, "We are keen that the rights of not only bigger states like Tamil Nadu, but also the rights of union territories like Puducherry should be protected." Stating that Puducherry had not gained during the ten-year rule by BJP, Stalin said that the Prime Minister Narendra Modi was campaigning only in the name of religion and caste. "Modi has not highlighted any measure to ameliorate the lot of the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, but has been campaigning in the name of religion and caste," he said. He also said that Modi had not done anything to realise the promise he had held out in the past to make the union territory "best Puducherry." —*PTI*

PET FIESTA

A woman carries a Macau as visitors enjoy watching animals displayed at Pet Fiesta, an annual festival, at Jayamahal Palace in Bengaluru on Sunday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

NIA SAYS MOB ATTACKED TEAM IN WEST BENGAL

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

National Investigation Agency (NIA) on Sunday strongly refuted the allegation of mala fide intention while carrying out raids and arrests in a two-year-old blast case during which its team was attacked by an unruly crowd in West Bengal's Purba Medinipur district. One NIA officer was injured and a vehicle was damaged on Saturday when the NIA team was going to arrest two people in the Bhupatinagar blast case, in which three people were killed in December 2022. "NIA categorically refuted allegations of mala fide in its Bhupatinagar blast case," an agency spokesperson said.

NIA Spokesperson termed the entire controversy "unfortunate" and made it clear that it was "completely unprovoked". The statement came hours after TMC alleged an "unholy alliance" between NIA and BJP. —*PTI*

'Half Pak': Dinesh Gundu Rao's wife sues Yatnal

COOVERCOLLY INDRESH
BENGALURU, 7 APRIL

State Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao's spouse, Tabassum Rao, filed a complaint against Vijayapura BJP MLA Basanagouda Patil Yatnal on Sunday after he alleged that Dinesh's family harbours "half of Pakistan".

MLA Yatnal was responding to Dinesh's post on X, which ridiculed the BJP after the NIA detained a witness - BJP leader Sai Prakash of Shivamogga - in connection with the Rameshwaram Cafe bomb blast case that occurred on 1 March. Dinesh took to X and asked what the "saffron supporters" of the State would say now.

"With the NIA arresting a BJP worker, does it not imply the BJP's involvement in the Rameshwaram Cafe blast? Is there any clearer evidence that the saffron extremism propagated by the BJP in the name of religious protection is causing serious issues? What response does the central BJP, enforcing RSS ideologies nationwide, have for this?" Rao posted in Kannada.

He also sought explanations from the BJP for targeting the Congress-led State government in Karnataka over the Rameshwaram Cafe blast.

In response to this, Yatnal told reporters at Vijayapura that minister Dinesh's residence harbours "half of Pakistan".

Dinesh's wife Tabu took swift action and lodged a complaint with Sanjaynagar Police Station on Sunday. Previously, she had taken to X, urging BJP leaders to address MLA Yatnal's inflammatory statements.

"I am not in politics. I don't even know who Basanagouda Patil Yatnal is. I am involved in social work beyond religion," Tabu Rao told reporters after filing the complaint. "Is it BJP's politics to talk about someone's wife and children?" She asked if this is the respect given to women by BJP, who always chant Bharat Mata ki Jai.

She added, "Dinesh is in politics. Talking about him is natural. But I can't stand being spoken about. Besides, it is enough to see the Muslim card being played again and again. I have decided to file a criminal defamation suit soon."

Sanjaynagar Inspector Bagyavathi told Salar News, "We have received a complaint from Tabu Rao today and will take necessary action." However, an FIR was not filed at the time of publishing this story.

This is the second complaint filed against Yatnal regarding the same comments against Dinesh's family. On 6 April, Gandhinagar Block Congress Committee President J Saravanan lodged a complaint with Seshadripuram police station.

—*Salar News*

ED, CBI, NIA asking TMC leaders to join BJP, says Didi

PURULIA, 7 APRIL

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday alleged the central investigating agencies were asking TMC leaders to either join BJP or face action.

Addressing an election rally in Purulia district, she alleged agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the I-T Department were working as "arms" of BJP.

"Agencies such as the NIA, ED and CBI are being used to harass TMC leaders. They are carrying out raids without prior information, and barging into houses. What the women would do if someone entered their house when everyone was asleep in the dead of night?" she asked.

Banerjee was referring to Saturday's incident in Bhupatinagar where a team of NIA was attacked by a mob when it went to arrest two accused in a blast case. Asking people not to fall for any provocation, Banerjee alleged BJP was fanning communal passions during Ram Navami.

She also accused BJP-led government at the Centre of depriving West Bengal of funds for MGNREGA and PM-Awas schemes. "Election Commission will not give permission to us to give the money now. After the elections, we will construct the houses of the poor," she said. —*PTI*

KERALA COLLEGE SUICIDE

Student tortured for 29 hrs, reveals FIR

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Sidharthan JS, a 20-year-old veterinary student, whose body was found hanging inside the college hostel's bathroom in Kerala's Wayanad district on 18 February, was assaulted for around 29 hours "continuously" by seniors and classmates, according to a media report. The report added, he died by suicide after that.

The CBI has taken over the probe late Friday night. The agency has re-registered the FIR filed at the Vythiri police station in Wayanad against 20 people late Friday night, within hours of receiving a notification from the central government in this connection.

Citing the police documents, Sidharthan was subjected to 'cruel ragging' by his peers and seniors from 9 am on 16 February to 2 pm on 17 February. They reportedly assaulted him with hands and using a belt.

A photo of a vigil for Sidharthan, a student of Animal Sciences University, who was found hanging in his hostel bathroom, in Wayanad **PHOTO: PTI**

Besides the four Students Federation of India (SFI) leaders — union president Arun K, SFI unit secretary Amal Ihsan, and unit members Asif Khan and Abhishek S — 16 other accused have also been named in the FIR. The FIR has charged them with criminal conspiracy, abetment to suicide, and violations of the Kerala Prohibition of Ragging Act.

- Sidharthan was subjected to 'cruel ragging' by his peers and seniors from 9 am on 16 February to 2 pm on 17 February

Union Minister Rajeev Chandrasekhar, the NDA candidate for the Thiruvananthapuram Lok Sabha seat, had assured the student's family to expedite the launch of CBI investigation into the death. The victim's father, Jayaprakash, has alleged that his son was being harassed for eight months before his death, according to a news report.

—*Salar News with PTI*

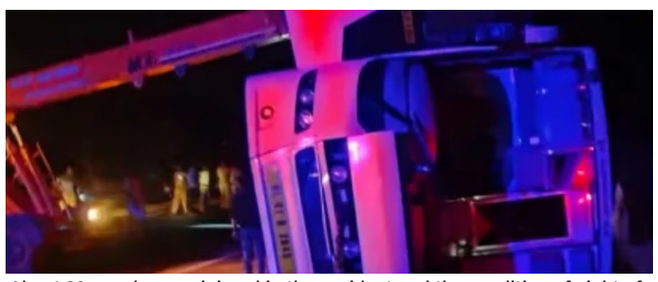
4 dead as B'luru-Gokarna bus overturns

CHITRADURGA, 7 APRIL

Four people were killed when a private bus heading to Gokarna in Uttara Kannada district from Bengaluru overturned early Sunday in this district, police said.

Initially, police sources said four persons were killed but later revised the death toll to three. The incident occurred near the Anjaneya Temple on the outskirts of Holalkere town.

Two of the deceased have been identified as Jagadish, 45, from Honnavar in Uttara Kannada district and Ganapathi ,40, from Sagara in Shivamogga district. The identity of the third dead person is yet to be ascertained. About 30 people were injured in the accident and the condition of eight of them is critical. The injured have been shifted to Holalkere Taluk Hospital while the bodies have been moved to a mortuary.



About 30 people were injured in the accident and the condition of eight of them is critical **PHOTO: X**

Angry residents blamed unscientific road construction for the frequent accidents on t he stretch. —*PTI*

Youth Congress General Secretary stabbbed, admitted

TUMAKURU, 7 APRIL

Youth Congress General Secretary, Keerthi was allegedly attacked by three BJP workers for taking part in the nomination event of Congress candidate from Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha constituency DK Suresh. Keerthi was stabbed with a knife in Nademavinapura of Kunigal taluk. Keerthi was allegedly attacked by BJP workers identified as - Chandru, Jagdish, and Sunil. Following a heated altercation the assailants engaged in a verbal spat with Keerthi, questioning her participation in the event. The situation quickly escalated as the assailants resorted to physical violence, allegedly striking Keerthi with a stick before stabbing her with a knife. Keerthi, who sustained injuries in the assault, was rushed to a private hospital in the City. A case has been registered against the accused at the Kunigal police station.

—Salar News

PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Fire erupts at TR Mills in Chamarajapet

BENGALURU, 7 APRIL

A fire broke out at a tire, pipe, and plywood godown of TR mills in Chamarajapet in the early hours of Sunday at 4 am. The fire, suspected to have been sparked by a short circuit and engulfed the entire godown. Speaking to Salar News, the fire personnel of Chamarajapet said, "The fire started around 4 am. Three fire brigades reached the spot with more than 20 fire personnels along with Karnataka Civil Defence personnel and Bengaluru City police. No casualties have been reported." Dense smoke covered the area, making firefighting operations challenging, they said. This marks the second incident reported this week. Approximately 11 individuals were rescued following a fire outbreak on the ground floor of a four-storey commercial building in RT Nagar on Friday.

—Salar News

24K Manipur people to vote from relief camps

IMPHAL, 7 APRIL

Eleven months of conflict, over 50,000 displaced people and an anti-poll sentiment among few---the Election Commission in violence-hit Manipur is gearing up for the challenging task of holding Lok Sabha elections in the state where the poll scene is muted. Chief Electoral Officer, Pradeep Kumar Jha said over 24,500 displaced people have been identified as eligible to vote in the upcoming elections and special arrangements have been made for them to cast their franchise from relief camps. At least 219 people have been killed in the ethnic strife in the state that started on 3 May last year.

—PTI

TDP promises quality liquor at reduced prices

AMARAVATI, 7 APRIL

"We will reduce prices of commodities," may be the standard refrain of every political party fighting an election. However, in Andhra Pradesh, Opposition TDP is wooing the avid booze lover with the promise of better-quality spirit at reduced prices, if voted to power. Simultaneous Lok Sabha and Assembly elections are scheduled in the southern state on 13 May. Telugu Desam Party (TDP) the main Opposition, is also accusing YSRCP Government of setting excessively high prices that do not align with the quality of the liquor. Liquor is sold through government-owned outlets in the state.

—PTI

Karnataka loses its cool: Kalaburagi records 43.1°C

City recorded 37.6°C , highest in the past eight years

BENGALURU, 7 APRIL

Several parts of the State have been experiencing extremely hot weather, of which Kalaburagi district recorded the highest temperature in the state at 43.1 degree Celsius on Sunday.

City recorded 37.6 degree Celsius, the highest that the mercury has gone in the past eight years in this city otherwise known for its pleasant weather.

Districts that are facing severe hot weather are Raichur (41.8 degree Celsius), Bagalkot (41.5°C), Koppal (41.3°C) and Vijayapura (41°C).

The Meteorology Department has also forecast dry weather for the State. However, light rainfall is likely to occur in isolated places over Chamarajanagar, Chikkamagaluru, Hassan, Kodagu and Shivamogga district in the next 24 hours.

It also predicted light rainfall on Tuesday at isolated places over Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Bidar, Kalaburgi, Raichur, Yadgir, Chamarajanagar, Chikkamagaluru, Hassan, Kodagu and Shivamogga districts.

The Met department said that the hot and humid conditions are likely to prevail over Dakshina Kannada, Udupi, Kodagu and Western parts of Chikkamagaluru districts for the next two days.

"Maximum temperature is very likely to gradually rise by 2°C to 4°C over all the districts of North Interior Karnataka and over Bengaluru Rural and Urban districts, Ramanagara, Shivamogga, Davanagere, Mysuru, Mandya, Hassan and Tumakuru districts of South Interior Karnataka during next two days," the department said.

It also said that nights would be warm in Uttara Kannada, Belagavi, Bagalkote, Dharwad, Raichur and Kalburgi districts during the next two days.

A heat wave is also predicted in Belagavi, Bidar, Vijayapura, Bagalkote, Gadag, Kalaburagi, Haveri, Dharwad, Koppal, Raichur, Yadagir, Ballari, Chitradurga, Davangere and Vijayanagara districts in the next 24 hours.

In view of the hot weather in Bengaluru, sunstroke wards have been opened in most hospitals, including the KC General Ward.

Doctors have advised people not to venture out without covering their heads and to hydrate themselves properly to avoid heatstrokes.

—PTI

Doctors have advised people not to venture out without covering their heads and to hydrate themselves to avoid heatstrokes PHOTO: PTI

POLL CAMPAIGN

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar' s wife Usha campaigns for her brother-in-law and Bengaluru Rural Congress candidate DK Suresh in Rajarajeshwarinagar in Bengaluru on Sunday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Poster wars erupt ahead of LS polls in Chamarajanagar

CHAMARAJANAGAR, 7 APRIL

Chamarajanagar constituency continues to make its presence felt in the upcoming lok sabha elections. In light of the recent events that have unfolded saw the emergence of provocative posters targeting prominent political figures, sparking controversy, calling for immediate action.

'Go back' posters of Congress' Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha candidate Sunil Bose were found on the streets of the city on Wednesday, the day he filed his nomination papers.

On the other hand, another poster disparaging BJP MP Srinivas Prasad has gone viral on social media platforms, triggering widespread outrage and condemnation. The poster, branding Prasad as 'half mad,' urges him to withdraw from politics and calls for his retirement. The derogatory content of the poster has sparked controversy and raised concerns over the increasing vitriol in the political discourse.

PHOTO: PTI

- 'Go back' posters of Congress' Chamarajanagar Lok Sabha candidate Sunil Bose were found on the streets of the city on Wednesday, the day he filed his nomination papers

Accusations have been hurled regarding the origins of the defamatory poster against Prasad. BJP has alleged the involvement of Congress leader Balaraju. BJP has however lodged a formal complaint with the Chamarajanagar cybercrime police station, seeking action against those responsible.

Addressing the Hanur constituency workers, Balaraju denied any role in the controversial poster. He expressed deep reverence for Prasad, emphasizing his commitment to ethical political conduct and condemning the circulation of false accusations

—Salar News

BJP-JD(S) sparks rift rumours in Hassan

MYSURU, 7 APRIL

The absence of former BJP MLA Preetham Gowda from the campaign trail for JD(S) candidate Prajwal Revanna in Hassan has raised eyebrows, hinting at the escalating tensions within the BJP-JD(S) alliance.

Also, neither Revanna nor Gowda made direct references to each other during media interactions in Mysuru on Sunday.

State BJP election in-charge Radha Mohan Das Agarwal acknowledged the reconciliation challenge in the Hassan constituency. While affirming the absence of inherent issues, Agarwal's statement that Gowda was assigned to Mysuru and Chamarajanagar, but was unavailable to campaign in Hassan, has stirred controversy.

Despite Agarwal's reassurances, the absence of cohesive campaigning efforts and murmurs of discontent among alliance members present a significant obstacle for the JD(S) candidate in Hassan. With

Prajwal Revanna and Preetham Gowda PHOTO: PTI

Congress camp eagerly eyeing the opportunity to capitalise on the discord, the BJP-JD(S) alliance faces a daunting task in fortifying its position in the crucial constituency.

The coordination meeting convened by Agarwal to address Preetham's absence in the joint rally of BJP-JD(S) in Hassan recently failed to yield tangible solutions, underscoring the deep-seated challenges confronting the alliance. As the electoral drama unfolds, the spectre of internal dissent looms large over the Hassan constituency, leaving the fate of the alliance hanging in the balance.

—Salar News

CHOLERA ROW: BMCRI HOSTEL WARDEN SUSPENDED

BENGALURU, 7 APRIL

Bangalore Medical College and Research Institute (BMCRI) hostel warden suspended after two students from the institution tested positive for cholera on 5 April.

The health department issued an order after the cholera was detected from the Victoria Hospital Kitchen where the meal was supplied to the medical students. At least 47 students were detected with the decease after which a suspension order issued to the hostel warden Akhilandeshwari and College Dean Dr Ramesh Krishna.

However 21 students from the college, suspected of a cholera outbreak, have been successfully treated and discharged from Victoria hospital on Saturday night. Rest of them are still undergoing the treatment.

Initially, two medical students were detected with cholera after which all 47 of them displaying symptoms. All of them were admitted to Victoria Hospital as they all complained of dehydration, and were diagnosed with acute gastroenteritis.

Earlier, Krishna stated that preventive measures are being implemented at the hostel. These measures include disinfection of the kitchen, supply of food and water from the Victoria Hospital kitchen, and implementation of pest control measures.

The Karnataka Health and Family Welfare Department has confirmed six cases of cholera in the state this year, with five reported in March 2024.

—Salar News

Caution

- Don't consume water directly from taps
- Avoid water from open wells
- Avoid untreated water
- Avoid consuming raw or under cooked food

POLL BATTLE

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah with other leaders on a roadshow to campaign for Bengaluru North constituency candidate Rajeev Gowda at Malleshwaram in Bengaluru on Sunday PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Siddaramaiah says he's confident of Rajeev Gowda's win

BENGALURU, 7 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Sunday expressed confidence in Prof Rajeev Gowda's candidacy for the Bengaluru North Lok Sabha constituency. Speaking at the Women's and Booth level leaders conference in Dasarahalli Assembly constituency Siddaramaiah praised Gowda's qualifications, knowledge, concern for the people, and populist ideology, stating that these qualities make him a strong candidate to win in Bengaluru North.

Meanwhile, hitting out at BJP Bengaluru North candidate Shobha Karandlaje, who faced "go-back" slogans from BJP workers in Udupi-Chikkamagaluru, he called upon voters in the North Lok Sabha constituency to send her back from there as well. He criticised Karandlaje for allegedly maintaining silence against the injustices to the State during her tenure.

Siddaramaiah also criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi, for not fulfilling his promises of bringing back black money, creating 2 crore jobs annually, and reducing prices of essential commodities. He also highlighted the implementation of five guarantees by the ruling Congress government to alleviate people's hardships.

He accused former prime minister Deve Gowda of joining forces with Modi despite previously stating that he would leave India if Modi became Prime Minister again. Also, Siddaramaiah lamented the alleged injustice faced by the State in tax revenue sharing and criticised Modi and Amit Shah for not providing drought relief funds.

Siddaramaiah urged Kannadigas to gain self-respect by defeating BJP, which he accused of betraying the State's people. He said, "Responding to the Central government's price hikes, we have implemented five guarantees through which people can save Rs 5,000 - 6,000 every month." Siddaramiah noted that this benefit will continue to reach people's doorsteps every month until Congress government is in power.

—Salar News

DKS thanks FM for 'admitting injustice'

BENGALURU, 7 APRIL

DK Shivakumar PHOTO: PTI

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar expressed gratitude towards Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for acknowledging injustice to Karnataka in drought relief.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday in Rajarajeshwari Nagar, Shivakumar said, "Sitharaman has said that the announcement of general elections delayed drought relief funds to Karnataka. What is the connection between elections and drought relief? By saying this, she has admitted that drought relief is delayed and the Centre has done injustice to Karnataka. She was accusing the State of not doing enough for drought relief."

Sitharaman on Saturday clarified that the central government cannot be held responsible for the delay in releasing drought relief to Karnataka. She explained that the Central Election Commission did not authorise the convening of the Union Cabinet Committee meeting. The Ministry of Agriculture and Home Ministries had reviewed a report on the drought situation in the State. The Union Cabinet Committee indicated that it was unable to convene a meeting without the Commission's approval.

Shivakumar criticised the central government for citing reasons to delay drought relief, stating, "We submitted our drought relief appeal four months ago, well before the imposition of the Model Code of Conduct. Now, they're using the Code of Conduct as an excuse. People are aware of the Centre's injustice. This only validates DK Suresh's 'Our Tax, Our Right' campaign." He remarked, "Kumaraswamy is now speaking about Mekedatu and Mahadayi, but he didn't take any action on these issues when he was in power."

—Salar News

PILGRIMAGE ON HOLD

Israel war disrupts Holy Land tours from City

DANIEL GEORGE
BENGALURU, 7 APRIL

A large number of Christians from Bengaluru who normally go on the pilgrimage to Holy Land (parts of Israel, Egypt and Jordan where the events of Bible happened) between April and June cannot go this year due to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Ministry of Tourism in Israel has issued an advisory urging operators to suspend all Holy Land tours due to the war.

Christopher Harris, a City-based tour operator who specialises in Holy Land tours, told Salar News "The prevailing situation in Israel and the neighbouring countries has dented the hopes of hundreds of Christians who go on Holy Land trips. On average, I used to send around 1,500 people every year on group visas on the tour. This time with no assurance from the Embassy of Israel in India, those wanting to go on the tour have put their plans on hold."

Victor David, another operator in the City, said a lot of attractions in the Holy Land are not in the conflict zone. "Gaza is located 75km from Jerusalem, but people cannot visit any more due to the advisory. People will have to wait till there is peace again in the strife-torn Israel for tours to begin again."

On an average, around 15,000 people from Karnataka visit the Holy Land with Bengaluru alone accounting for 5,000 of these visitors, Harris said. "The trip costs Rs 1.50 lakh per person for 10 nights and 11 days, which are inclusive of hotel booking, airport transfers and tickets to pilgrimage sights. The pilgrims will only have to pay for the souvenirs they buy from Holy Land," the tour operator said.

Most of the pilgrims wanting to go on the tour are senior citizens who have saved for the trip over the years, Harris said. "They are hoping and praying that we can do the tour, as it is the journey of a lifetime for them and dear to their hearts," he said.

Absconding tourists

Lionel Rajashekar, another tour operator, said: "The Israel Embassy in New Delhi has become strict with visas as six people from Thiruvananthapuram had absconded while in Israel. Those absconded included women in their late 60s".

Harris said: "It's a huge risk, and over the years travel agencies have learned to weed out people who they feel might jump. The first red flag is customers who are not concerned about the package cost.

They stay back and start working as housemaids for two years, make money and then return to India after serving a short jail term where they even earn a stipend while in jail."

Harris said: "There is a huge demand for caregivers and which is the key attraction for the visitors to abscond. Workers engaged full time are paid 5,571.53 Israeli New Shekels (NIS), which is equivalent to Rs 1.2 lakh per month."

Seven Keralites who were part of a tour group went missing in Israel in July last year. Green Oasis Tours and Travels, the travel agency that organised the trip, alleged that the missing tourists "absconded in search of jobs" in the West Asian country.

Israel is a state party to the 1951 Refugee Convention but has yet to adopt national refugee legislation.

A United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) 2022 factsheet on Israel shows over the past 15 years, more than 80,000 people have sought asylum.

With Israel's construction sector suffering a severe manpower crisis after the conflict with Hamas, some 10,000 workers from India made their way to the strife-torn country earlier this year.

The Israeli construction industry has been facing a deep crisis and several ongoing projects are getting either stalled or delayed.

—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

Rahul asks people to share feedback on Cong manifesto

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Former Congress president Rahul Gandhi Sunday said his party's manifesto for the Lok Sabha polls has been hailed by many as revolutionary, and urged people to share their feedback on the document through social media."The Congress manifesto is the voice of every Indian, share your thoughts on social media," he said.In the video, many people told him that it is a "revolutionary" manifesto. Gandhi asked them to share feedback with him on the manifesto and tell him what they liked about it and what they did not. The Congress on Friday released its Lok Sabha poll manifesto, focusing on five "pillars of justice" and 25 guarantees under those. Right to apprenticeship, a legal guarantee on the minimum support price (MSP) for crops, a constitutional amendment to raise the 50 per cent cap on reservations for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs) and Other Backward Classes (OBC), a nationwide caste census and scrapping the Agnipath scheme are among the promises in the manifesto.*—PTI*

TN: ₹4 cr seized from 3 suspected BJP supporters

CHENNAI, 7 APRIL

A team of Flying squad has seized Rs 4 crore from three people who were on their way to Tirunelveli in the poll-bound Tamil Nadu, police and election officials said on Sunday.The office of the state Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) said the Income Tax department will launch a detailed investigation into the matter.The three persons had boarded a train to Tirunelveli from Egmore here and the team of officials intercepted them at nearby Tambaram late last night and found Rs 4 crore in their possession. They had no valid documents to carry the said amount of cash. They are suspected to be supporters of BJP's Tirunelveli Lok Sabha candidate Nainar Nagendran and have been detained for interrogation. *—PTI*

Maoist den to witness voting for first-time

RANCHI, 7 APRIL

Many interior areas in the Maoist den of Singhbhum Lok Sabha seat in Jharkhand will witness voting for the first time, or after decades-long gap, as polling teams and materials will be air dropped from helicopters to enable people living in Saranda, Asia's densest Sal forest, to exercise their franchise. As many as 118 remote booths will be set up by personnel and materials dropped from choppers."We are committed to ensuring that no voter is left out...," West Singhbhum Deputy Commissioner cum District Election Officer Kuldeep Chaudhary told PTI.

—PTI

AAP plaints against BJP for shielding Church secy from ED

T'PURAM, 7 APRIL

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has lodged a complaint against BJP leader PC George for allegedly offering help to the secretary of the Church of South India to shield him from the Enforcement Directorate's actions during the election. The AAP's Kerala general secretary, Arun lodged a complaint with the Election Commission against the former Poonjar MLA, who had recently joined BJP. According to the complaint, PC George, a BJP member and former MLA, made a public declaration of support to the secretary of the South CSI Church, ostensibly to shield him from potential legal consequences related to the Enforcement Directorate's activities.*—PTI*

Now, TMC alleges 'unholy alliance' between NIA-BJP

The party also questioned the suspicious silence of EC

KOLKATA, 7 APRIL

Alleging an "unholy alliance" between National Investigation Agency (NIA) and BJP, Trinamool Congress on Sunday said the Election Commission remains "conspicuously silent" to the issue. TMC national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee said in a post on X handle, "Experience the unfolding alliance between the @NIA_India and @BJP4Bengal, orchestrating conspiracies against Trinamool leaders and the Model Code of Conduct.

"While this collusion persists, the ECI stands by, conspicuously silent, neglecting its duty to ensure fair play," Banerjee said.

His post was preceded by a press meet by TMC where senior party leader Kunal Ghosh alleged that a senior state BJP leader from Paschim Bardhaman district, who had earlier been with TMC, had met an NIA SP at his apartment in New Town area of the city on 26 March evening and handed over a list of TMC leaders to be arrested by NIA ahead of the Lok Sabha elections from different parts of the state.

"I dare this leader to either refute my allegations with substantial proof of his movement on that day or we will come up with his call records and CCTV footage evidence after 48 hours," Ghosh said.

TMC leader Kunal Ghosh during a press conference at party office in Kolkata on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

Senior Bengal minister and TMC women's wing state president Chandrima Bhattacharya, who was present at the hurriedly called press meet, said she would only add that NIA has dug up a case of fireworks blast of 2022 after one and half years just before the elections and "found involvement of key TMC leaders in Bhupatinagar."

"This shows it is not just a case of NIA proceeding to arrest some people in connection with an incident and facing protests from locals. It shows the deep-rooted conspiracy against TMC by BJP using central agencies," she added.

Former Asansol Mayor and senior BJP leader Jitendra Tewary told a TV channel the TMC is finding the ground slipping under its feet due to the mounting corruption and involvement in cases of terror and atrocities against women and poor villagers and hence "concocting lies and fictitious narratives.

- BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya told reporters the TMC allegations testify to the desperation of the state's ruling party to build up false narratives against mounting evidence of involvement of its activists and leaders in misdeeds

"If TMC leader Kunal Ghosh fails to come up with evidence that me or any of our leaders had been involved in influencing NIA probe or meeting any of their officials, I will file a defamation case against him," Tewary added.

BJP spokesperson Samik Bhattacharya told reporters the TMC allegations testify to the desperation of the state's ruling party to build up false narratives against mounting evidence of involvement of its activists and leaders in misdeeds. *—PTI*

DARING THE BJP

AAP leaders hold fast to protest over Kejri's arrest

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Top AAP leaders held a day-long fast at Jantar Mantar here on Sunday to protest against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's arrest by the ED and asserted that people will give a fitting reply to the BJP in the upcoming Lok Sabha polls for sending him to jail.

The AAP leaders also dared the ruling BJP at the Centre to impose president's rule in Delhi, claiming that the saffron party will be erased from the national capital in that case.

Scores of volunteers and supporters of the AAP took part in the fast, singing patriotic songs and carrying posters bearing an image of Kejriwal behind bars.

Similar protests were held in other states as well as by Indians abroad, including at the Harvard Square in Boston, the Hollywood Sign in Los Angeles, outside the Indian embassy in Washington DC, at the Times Square in New York and in Toronto, London and Melbourne, among other places, AAP leaders said.

Gopal Rai, the convenor of the party's Delhi unit, asserted that Kejriwal will come out of jail and join the country's fight against the BJP's "dictatorship".

The stage in which the AAP leaders were seated during the six-hour fast had an image of Kejriwal behind bars in the backdrop. Portraits of BR Ambedkar and Bhagat Singh flanking Mahatma Gandhi's photo were kept in front of the stage.Addressing the protesters at Jantar Mantar, the AAP's Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh, who was recently granted bail by the Supreme Court in the Delhi excise "scam" case, asserted that "Kejriwal was, is and will remain honest".Singh questioned Kejriwal's arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money-laundering case linked to the liquor "scam". He claimed that Kejriwal's name was mentioned by just four of the 456 witnesses of the CBI and the ED, the two agencies probing the case. "People know very well under what situation these witnesses named Kejriwal," the AAP leader said. *—PTI*

Top AAP leaders including Atishi Singh and others held day- long fast at Jantar Mantar on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

SANATAN DHARMA ROW

Modi equating BJP with God: Tejashwi takes a jibe

PATNA, 7 APRIL

RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav on Sunday charged Prime Minister Narendra Modi with "equating the BJP with God" by claiming opposition parties were against Sanatan Dharma.

Talking to reporters here, he claimed that public dissatisfaction and its possible impact on the Lok Sabha polls have "scared" the Prime Minister, a reason why he was campaigning intensively despite predicting victory.

"It is unbecoming of a Prime Minister," snapped Yadav when his comments were sought on remarks by the Primr Minister, at a rally in Bihar's Nawada district, that opposition parties like the Congress and its allies were 'Sanatan virodhi' (anti-Sanatan Dharma).

The former deputy chief minister also lamented that the Modi did not respond, in the Nawada speech, to the points he had raised in a social media post early in the morning.

RJD leader Tejaswi Yadav with Vikassheel Insaan Party Chief Mukesh Sahani and other leaders during press conference on Friday *PHOTO: PTI*

In the post on X, Yadav had accused the BJP of indulging in "institutional, organised and systematic corruption", which was marked by huge donations to the party through electoral bonds and hounding of political adversaries through ED, CBI and IT department.

Yadav, who is named in land-for-jobs scam, pertaining to father Lalu Prasad's tenure as Railway Minister when he was a minor, had also sought to know why the agencies took no action against leaders of the BJP who faced corruption allegations and how come turncoats from the opposition camp often got reprieve after crossing over. *—PTI*

NITISH TROLLED FOR FAUX PAS AT PM'S RALLY

PATNA, 7 APRIL

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar was on Sunday trolled on social media for predicting that the NDA will win "more than 4,000 seats", several times the sanctioned strength of Lok Sabha.

Kumar, who heads the JD(U) and returned to the BJP-led coalition less than three months ago, made the faux pas at a rally in Nawada district where he spoke before Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

In a portion of his speech that has gone viral, Kumar can be heard fumbling "char lakh (four lakh)", before correcting himself and uttering "char hazaar se bhi zyada (more than 4,000)", while turning towards the Prime Minister whom he has been wishing a "400 plus tally" in the elections.

On the wrong side of 70, Kumar, the longest-serving chief minister of Bihar, has been in the news for slips of the tongue on a few occasions. *—PTI*

It's Mehbooba against Ghulam in Anantnag

SRINAGAR, 7 APRIL

Peoples Democratic Party president Mehbooba Mufti will contest the Lok Sabha polls from the Anantnag-Rajouri seat against DPAP president Ghulam Nabi Azad, making the newly carved out constituency the most high-profile contest in Jammu and Kashmir in these elections.

The National Conference has fielded influential Gujjar leader Mian Altaf Ahmad

PHOTO: PTI

from the seat and the Apni Party has named Zaffar Iqbal Manhas. The BJP has not announced its candidate so far.

PDP Parliamentary Board Chief Sartaj Madni on Sunday announced the party candidates for the three seats of Kashmir. The party's youth wing president Waheed Parra will contest the polls from Srinagar and former Rajya Sabha member Mir Fayaz from Baramulla. The candidates were announced by the party at a press conference addressed by Mufti and Madni. They said the PDP will support the Congress on two Jammu region seats of Udhampur and Jammu.

Asked if the Congress will reciprocate in Kashmir, the She said she was not extending support to the national party on quid pro quo basis. "We have decided to support the Congress for the larger fight to save the Constitution and democracy."On her party contesting against INDIA bloc partner National Conference, Mufti said she had left the ball in Farooq Abdullah's court. *—PTI*

ED uses TV, fridge invoices as evidence against Soren

NEW DELHI/RANCHI, 7 APRIL

PHOTO: PTI

Invoices of a refrigerator and smart TV are among the evidence the Enforcement Directorate used to support its claim that Jharkhand's ex-chief minister Hemant Soren acquired 8.86 acres of land worth more than Rs 31 crore illegally.

The federal probe agency obtained these receipts from two Ranchi-based dealers and attached those to its charge sheet filed against the 48-year-old Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader and four others last month.

The special PMLA court of Judge Rajiv Ranjan in Ranchi took cognisance of the prosecution complaint on 4 April.

Soren was arrested by the ED on 31 January in a money laundering case related to the alleged land grab, shortly after he resigned as chief minister. He is currently in judicial custody in Birsa Munda jail at Hotwar in Ranchi.

According to the ED, the two gadgets were purchased in the name of the family members of one Santosh Munda who told the agency that he has been "residing as a caretaker of the property of Hemant Soren on the said land (8.86 acres) for 14 to 15 years".

The agency used Munda's statement to counter Soren's claim that he had no link with the said land. The ED also rejected the claim of a person named Rajkumar Pahan on the piece of land, alleging that he was a "front" for Soren to keep the asset under his control.

The ED claimed that soon after Soren was issued the first summons in this case in August last year, Pahan wrote to the deputy commissioner of Ranchi stating he and some others have the land in possession and the earlier mutation in the name of other owners be cancelled and they may be saved from being evicted from their property. *—PTI*

Pilibhit: Maneka, Varun not in fray after 3 decades

PILIBHIT, 7 APRIL

For the first time in more than three decades the mother-son duo of Maneka and Varun Gandhi will not be in the fray from the Pilibhit constituency for which the BJP is going full throttle with Prime Minister Narendra Modi set to address a mega election rally here on Tuesday.

The party has denied a ticket to sitting MP Varun Gandhi from the constituency that has been represented either by him or his mother since 1996. Instead, it has fielded Uttar Pradesh Minister Jitin Prasada from the seat.

Prasada, who won the 2004 and 2009 Lok Sabha polls from Shahjahanpur and Dharura constituencies, respectively, on Congress ticket, crossed over to the BJP in 2021. So far, he is the only Uttar Pradesh cabinet minister to be fielded in this Lok Sabha polls.

However, the member of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Council is facing an uphill task of making a political ground for himself in Pilibhit where locals express a deep connection with Varun Gandhi.

"Jitin Prasada has very little influence in Pilibhit. As of now, he is being seen as an outsider fielded up by the BJP for the polls here," said Sushil Kumar Gangwar, a retired college principal.

Maneka Gandhi won the seat on a Janata Dal ticket in 1989, lost in 1991 and won again in 1996. She won from the constituency again in 1998 and 1999 as an Independent candidate. She won the seat in 2004 and 2014 as a BJP candidate. Varun Gandhi won the seat in 2009 and 2019 as a BJP candidate.

She is seeking reelection from Sultanpur which she won as BJP candidate in 2019.

Baburam Lodhi, a local village head, said, "Varun Gandhi's connection with Pilibhit is very old and deep. This bond was reflected in the emotional letter he wrote after being denied nomination from the seat."

Though Jitin Prasada claims to have the full support of the party organisation, locals claim those close to Varun are not happy with the BJP's decision. *—PTI*

PRASHANT KISHOR'S TAKE

'BJP may win but Modi not invincible'

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Validating the BJP's claims, eminent political strategist Prashant Kishor said the ruling party will add significantly to its seats and vote share in south and east India, the two regions where its hold is weak-to-non-existent, barring Karnataka.

In an interaction with PTI editors, Kishor also said despite the BJP's apparent dominance, neither the party nor Prime Minister Narendra Modi is invincible, pointing out that the opposition had three distinct and realistic chances of stopping the BJP juggernaut but frittered away the opportunities because of laziness and misplaced strategies.

"They (BJP) will either be first or second party in Telangana which is a big thing. They will be number one in Odisha for sure. You would be surprised as, in all likelihood, to my mind, the BJP is going to be the number one party in West Bengal," he said. In Tamil he said, BJP's vote share may hit double-digit percentage.

Strategist Prashant Kishor said opposition had distinct chances of stopping the BJP juggernaut but frittered away the opportunities *PHOTO: PTI*

Telangana, Odisha, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Kerala together account for 204 seats in the 543-member Lok Sabha but the BJP couldn't cross 50 seats in all these states put together either in 2014 or 2019 when it won 29 and 47 constituencies respectively.

He, however, asserted that the BJP is unlikely to win 370 seats, its target set for the polls.

In Andhra Pradesh, where assembly polls will be held alongside the Lok Sabha elections, he said Chief Minister Jagan Mohan Reddy will find it "very difficult" to come back. Kishor had worked for Reddy in 2019 when his YSRC party had vanquished the incumbent Telugu Desam Party, now a BJP ally.

Reddy, like former Chhattisgarh chief minister Bhupesh Baghel, has gone into a "provider" mode for his constituents, instead of being a fulfiller of people's aspirations. He likened the situation to the yesteryear monarchs who took care of their people with doles and largesse but nothing more.

Similarly, Reddy has ensured cash transfer to people but has done little to provide jobs or boost the stagnating development of the state, he said.

Speaking of the Lok Sabha polls starting from 19 April, he said the BJP will feel the heat only if the opposition, especially the Congress, can ensure that it loses at least around 100 seats in its strongholds of north and west India. And that's not going to happen, he says.

"By and large, the BJP will be able to hold its ground in these regions," he said.

The BJP has made a major and visible push to expand in south and east India over the years as its top leaders like Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah have frequented these states. On the other hand, the opposition has made little effort in these states. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X/@fireflurycorps

Army rescues 80 people stranded in Ladakh

LEH, 7 APRIL

At least 80 people, including women and children, were rescued after they were left stranded amid snowfall in 17,688-feet-high Chang La pass between Leh and Shyok river valley in the Union Territory of Ladakh, the Army said on Sunday. The midnight operation was carried out by the soldiers of the Trishul Division, Leh-based Fire and Fury Corps of the Indian Army said. "Soldiers of Trishul Division responded immediately to an emergent situation at icy heights of Chang La to clear a traffic block, working relentlessly for two hours in the night, and brought relief to almost 80 persons including ladies & children stuck amidst the snowfall," the corps wrote on its official social media handle X. It also shared a few pictures and a video of the rescue. *—PTI*

2 farmers killed in lightning strikes in West Bengal

KOLKATA, 7 APRIL

Two farmers were killed in lightning strikes in southern West Bengal on Sunday, officials said. A 26-year-old man was killed in a lightning strike in Tarakeswar in Hooghly district. The incident happened when Lakshman Malik, the deceased, was working in the field amid rains, they said. In North 24 Parganas district, one Nepal Halder, 38, died while working in a field. The incident happened in Gaighata, they added. The rains brought down the mercury, giving respite to the people after days of heatwave conditions. *—PTI*

1 killed as speeding car rams into running train in MP

ANUPPUR, 7 APRIL

A car driver was killed and another occupant severely injured when the vehicle rammed into a running train after breaking the barrier of a closed railway crossing in Madhya Pradesh's Anuppur district, police said on Sunday. The accident took place around Saturday midnight in Jaithari area, they said. The car broke the closed railway crossing and hit the Hirakud Express, Bilaspur-based South East Central Railways public relations officer Ambikesh Sahu said. The car driver, identified as Narendra Verma, died on the spot and another vehicle occupant received injuries, Jaithari police station inspector PC Kol said. Police removed the damaged car from the tracks to smoothen rail traffic, he said. No one on board the train was injured, Sahu said. The injured car occupant, Parmeshwar Sahu, a resident of Chhindwara district in MP, was rushed to a local hospital from where he was shifted to Bilaspur in neighbouring Chhattisgarh for advance health care. *—PTI*

2 women beat up temple guards over taking video

UJJAIN, 7 APRIL

Three women security guards were allegedly beaten up by two women and a few others after they stopped them from shooting videos in the prohibited area of Mahakaleshwar Temple in Madhya Pradesh's Ujjain, police said on Sunday. The incident occurred in the premises of the Mahakaleshwar Temple on Saturday, an official said. Two women, identified as Palak and Pari, and a few other persons allegedly manhandled and thrashed three women guards after they were stopped from shooting video reels in the prohibited area on the temple premises, Mahakal police station in-charge Ajay Verma said. The guards, Shivani Pushpad, Sandhya Prajapati and Sangeeta Changesia, work for a private security firm, he said. *—PTI*

Heat to hit outdoor workers the most

Experts advocated for flexible hours and mandatory breaks to help workers

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

As the country braces for extreme heat in the April-June period with the temperatures already starting to rise, researchers have sounded the alarm over detrimental effects it can have on outdoor workers in farming, construction and other sectors.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) recently said above-normal maximum temperatures were likely over most parts of the country in April-June this year, and the central and western peninsular parts are expected to face the worst impact. Above-normal heatwave days are likely over most parts of the plains, it said.

Following the adverse weather warning, researchers are advocating for novel ways of working outdoors, including flexible hours and mandatory breaks, to help workers adapt to the effects of heat, made increasingly humid because of climate change.

"Dry heat is relatively easier to handle. When the body heats up and we drink water, there is evaporation and the body cools down. However, in humid heat, evaporation reduces because of high moisture in the air which hampers the body's cooling mechanism," Vimal Mishra, Vikram Sarabhai Chair Professor, Civil Engineering and Earth Sciences, IIT Gandhinagar, said.

An international study examining how tropical heat impacts outdoor workers has found that for one degree Celsius of additional warming, roughly 800 million people will live in areas needing hours of heavy work to be cut down by more than half over the entire year.

The researchers call for the empowerment of outdoor workers by raising their self-awareness and agency in decision-making *PHOTO: PIXABAY*

Another study, conducted in Tamil Nadu and published in October last year, found that occupational exposure to extreme heat more than doubled the risk of miscarriage in pregnant women, with the heat generally raising the overall risk of adverse pregnancy and birth outcomes.

The study assessed 800 pregnant women, 47 per cent of whom were exposed to heat while working outdoors.

Among the women exposed to extreme heat, 6.1 per cent had still and preterm births, compared to 2.6 per cent of the women exposed to heat within safe limits, it said.

Mishra said that unless adaptation measures were implemented, the vulnerable tropical outdoor workers were in store for a future with more extreme heat, accompanied by more pronounced adverse impacts.

The researchers also called for the empowerment of outdoor workers by raising their self-awareness and agency in decision-making. *—PTI*

Nainital sees surge in tourists

Nainital, 7 April

Amid the increasing temperature in the plains of North India, neighboring Nainital in Uttarakhand is witnessing a huge influx of tourists from across the country seeking respite from the scorching heat. The lake city has been bustling with tourists, and shopkeepers and traders are happy with their booming business due to the large number of arrivals. Chairperson of the Hotel Association, Digvijay Bisht said that Nainital is enjoying pleasant weather and that the city is witnessing tourists from all over India. "However, due to the Lok Sabha elections, tourists are facing hurdles in carrying cash," he said. *—ANI*

IMD using AI to enhance forecasts

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

India's weather scientists have started harnessing the power of artificial intelligence and machine learning to enhance weather forecasts, India Meteorological Department (IMD) Director General Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said.

In a free-wheeling interaction with PTI editors, he said over the next few years, the emerging technologies would also complement numerical weather forecasting models which are widely used at present to predict weather.

He said the weather office has been increasing observational systems to make mesoscale weather forecasts at the panchayat level or over 10 sq km area at a faster rate.

IMD has deployed a network of 39 doppler weather radars that cover 85 per cent of the country's landmass and enable hourly forecasts for prominent cities, Mohapatra said.

"We have started using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in a limited way but within the next five years, AI will significantly enhance our models and techniques," he said.

Mohapatra said the IMD has digitised weather records for the country dating back to 1901 and artificial intelligence could be used to sift through this plentiful information to generate knowledge about weather patterns.AI are data science models which do not go into the physics of the phenomena but utilise past data to generate knowledge that can be used to make better forecasts, the IMD director general said."Both artificial intelligence and numerical forecasting models will complement each other to improve forecast accuracy. Both will work hand in hand and nobody can replace the other," he said. *—PTI*

Extended poll timings, ORS to help voters deal with heat

RANCHI, 7 APRIL

In anticipation of intense heat during the Lok Sabha polls in Jharkhand, comprehensive measures have been put in place to mitigate the effects of heat waves on voters, officials, and security personnel.

These include extending poll timings, setting up makeshift sheds, providing ORS and lemon water, and deploying medical teams and ambulances, an election official said.

With over 2.55 crore eligible voters, including 1.25 crore women, increasing voter turnout amidst the heatwave presents a significant challenge for both the state and the Election Commission.

In 2019, Jharkhand's overall voter turnout was 66.8 per cent, lower than the national average of 67.4 per cent.

To address this measures such as extending polling hours from 7 am to 5 pm and providing temporary shelters at booths have been implemented.

Jharkhand Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) K Ravi Kumar assured that these arrangements aim to ensure voters' safety and convenience during the polling period.

Kumar said they have taken several initiatives to reduce the impact of heatwave conditions on voters.

Temporary sheds of 15x15 feet are being set up in all the booths of the state. "There will be permanent as well as temporary sheds for the polling parties and voters in all booths this time," he said. *—PTI*

Namaz row: Guj varsity removes 7 foreign students

AHMEDABAD, 7 APRIL

Six students from Afghanistan and one from East Africa have been asked to vacate the Gujarat University's hostel rooms for overstaying, an official said on Sunday, in a move coming weeks after some foreign students were attacked for offering namaz on the premises.

An Afghan and a Gambian delegation had visited the university days after the 16 March attack and held a meeting with the vice-chancellor over safety measures.

Talking to PTI, the university's vice-chancellor Neerja Gupta said, "Six students from Afghanistan and one from East Africa were asked to vacate their hostel rooms after they were found overstaying."

These people had completed their studies and were staying in the hostel as ex-students due to some pending administrative work, she said.

The university has ensured that they are no longer required to stay in the hostel and arranged for them to return to their respective countries, Gupta said.

"We have completed the required paperwork and they can now safely return to their native countries. We don't want to keep any former students in our hostel. We have informed the consulates of the respective countries, and they have also directed these students to vacate the hostel," the vice-chancellor said.

Around two dozen people barged into the government-run university's hostel on the night of 16 March and assaulted students from foreign countries for offering namaz at one of the blocks during the ongoing month of Ramadan, police said. *—PTI*

Around two dozen people assaulted students from foreign countries for offering namaz on 16 March *Photo: PTI*

WORLD HEALTH DAY

Participants during a bicycle rally on the World Health Day, in Bhopal on Sunday *PHOTO: PTI*

8 suffer side-effects post cataract surgery

INDORE, 7 APRIL

As many as eight people allegedly suffered from side-effects after cataract surgery at a hospital in Indore last month, prompting the local administration to seal the medical facility's operation theatre and launch a probe into the matter, officials said on Sunday.

It is difficult to say whether these patients have lost their eyesight or not and things will be clear after the investigation, they said.

A managing trustee of the hospital, however said there was no negligence and claimed the eight patients had a "reaction" in their eyes due to unknown reasons and all of them were discharged after treatment.

The local administration has constituted a three-member committee which has started the probe into the reasons for the side-effects suffered by the patients, District Blindness Control Society manager Dr Pradeep Goyal said.

The cataract surgeries were carried out on 79 patients at government expenses on 20 March at the Choithram Netralaya here in Madhya Pradesh under the National Programme for Control of Blindness, he said.The hospital's operation theatre where the cataract surgeries was performed on these patients has been sealed, he said. *—PTI*

Rivers between Mahanadi, Pennar have no water

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Rivers between Mahanadi and Pennar basins that flow through Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Odisha have no water at present, according to the Central Water Commission data (CWC).

Rushikulya, Bahuda, Vamsadhara, Nagavati, Sarada, Varaha, Tandava, Eluru, Gundlakamma, Tammileru, Musi, Paleru and Manneru are the rivers left with no water, with experts blaming reduced monsoon, changing rainfall patterns, catchment degradation and groundwater depletion for it.

Nitin Bassi from the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW) said their analysis of the Mahanadi river basin has suggested adoption of micro irrigation systems and altering cropping patterns could reduce the water deficit from 24 per cent (in a business-as-usual scenario) to about 18 per cent of the water supply requirement.

CWC has detailed the state of water storage in reservoirs, noting that live storage capacity has dwindled to just 35 per cent of the total capacity. According to the data, the east flowing rivers between Mahanadi and Pennar had zero storage this year.

The data, issued on 4 April, presents a stark comparison to the same period last year, highlighting a substantial decline in available water resources. *—PTI*

CREATING A HAVEN

Latur couple saviours of underprivileged kids

LATUR, 7 APRIL

In a nondescript village in Maharashtra's Latur district, a couple has created a haven for underprivileged children to educate them and make them self-reliant, and they are now proud parents to 51 boys and girls.

Moved by the plight of children from poor backgrounds, Sharad and Sangeeta Zare, both in their 40s, started with a humble endeavour to educate them but soon realised that teaching them different skills would secure their future.

The ashram is now home to children between the ages of six and 16 years *PHOTO: PTI*

The couple has set up 'Majha Ghar,' an ashram run by their organisation Manus Pratishthan, on 14 acres of land near Budhoda village in Ausa tehsil. The ashram is set up on 1.10 acres, while the remaining land is used for farming and various crops are produced by the children.

"Mahatma Gandhi introduced the concept 'Nai Talim' in 1937, dreaming of making villages independent and self-reliant. Similarly, I want to make my children self-reliant. We teach children to make idols and other items by reusing and recycling materials," Sharad said.

The idea to work for the underprivileged children took shape when he came across a tribal girl performing tricks on a tightrope in Pune in 2016, said Sharad, a postgraduate in mass communication.

The ashram is now home to children between the ages of six and 16 years, some of whom are enrolled in a day school nearby while the rest are taught at the ashram itself. *—PTI*

Tanpura, sitars made in Maharashtra get GI tags

PUNE, 7 APRIL

The sitars and tanpuras of Miraj, a small town in Maharashtra's Sangli district known for its craftsmanship in making musical instruments, have been awarded the coveted Geographical Indication (GI) tags.

These instruments made in Miraj are much in demand among some of the prominent artistes, including those renowned in the field of classical music as well as film industry, the makers claim.

On 30 March , the government of India's intellectual property office issued GI tag to the Miraj Musical Instruments Cluster for its sitars and to the Soultune Musical Instrument Producer firm for tanpuras.

The Miraj Musical Instruments Cluster functions as the apex body for both the sitar and tanpura makers in the town, its chairman Mohsin Mirajkar said.As part of the body, more than 450 craftsmen are engaged in the production of musical instruments, including sitars and tanpuras, he said.

"When we started receiving complaints about such products, we decided to pursue for the GI tag and applied for it in 2021," said Mirajkar."The online business accounts for around 10 per cent, while 30 to 40 per cent comes from the retail music instrument shops and the remaining 50 per cent are direct customers, including some well-known artistes," he said. *—PTI*

ISRAEL PROTEST

People take part in a protest against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and call for the release of hostages held in the Gaza Strip by the Hamas militant group in Tel Aviv, Israel, on Saturday
PHOTO: PTI

Water levels in South Indian reservoirs at 20% of capacity

Water storage in major reservoirs and river basins across the country continues to decline, with many reaching dangerously low levels, despite the fact that peak summer has yet to arrive. Data released by the Central Water Commission (CWC) on 4 April, 2024 revealed this concerning trend.

The situation raises alarms for potential drinking water shortages as well as low water availability for agriculture in the coming weeks and months. Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have been grappling with water shortages, primarily due to deficient rainfall during last year's monsoon season.

Currently, the live storage available in India's 150 major reservoirs, monitored by the CWC, stands at 61.801 billion cubic metres (BCM). This accounts for just 35 per cent of the total live storage capacity of these reservoirs. This storage level is lower than that of the corresponding period last year nationwide and also falls below the average storage of the last 10 years during the corresponding period.

The storage has been continuously and sharply decreasing. Last week, it stood at 64.606 BCM, and the week prior to that, it was 67.591 BCM.

Meanwhile, 13 east-flowing rivers between the Mahanadi and Pennar basins have remained devoid of water for the third consecutive week. Additionally, in major river basins like Pennar and Cauvery, the water levels are categorised as 'highly deficient' and 'deficient', respectively. In the Pennar basin, water levels have decreased from 3.71 per cent to 2.56 per cent compared to last week, while in the Cauvery basin, they have dropped from 23 per cent to 21 per cent during the same period.

Regarding the 42 reservoirs in the southern region monitored by the CWC, they were only filled to 20 per cent of their capacity. These reservoirs are located in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The storage during the corresponding period last year was 34 per cent and the average storage of the last 10 years during the corresponding period was 28 per cent of the live storage capacity of these 42 reservoirs.

Krishnagiri Reservoir project dam in Tamil Nadu, India ***PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA***

Water levels in the northern, eastern, western and central regions were 32 per cent, 45.24 per cent, 40 per cent and 43 per cent, respectively.

Major dams like Nagarjuna Sagar and Srisailam (both in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana), Tungabhadra and Ghataprabha (in Karnataka) have seen water levels dwindling. These dams provide irrigation water to farmers, are drinking water sources and also generate electricity. In Nagarjuna Sagar across the Krishna River, current live storage is just 0.111 BCM, which is only 2 per cent of its live capacity.

Out of 21 states that the CWC monitors reservoirs in, at least 13 had water levels less than the 'normal' storage. These were: Punjab, Rajasthan, Odisha, West Bengal, Nagaland, Bihar, Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

'Normal' storage means average storage of last 10 years.

River basin storage position has also shown a declining trend. At least 13 rivers — Rushikulya, Bahuda, Vamsadhara, Nagavali, Sarada, Varaha, Tandava, Eluru, Gundlakamma, Tammileru, Musi, Paleru, and Munneru — have had no water since 21 March, according to CWC data.

These rivers flow through an area of 86,643 square kilometres, with agricultural land covering approximately 60 per cent of the total area.

Declining water levels were observed in all river basins like Ganga, Godavari, Mahanadi, Tapi, Narmada, Mahi, Krishna and Brahmaputra, with the exception of Indus.

The present water level situation is alarming at a time when India Meteorological Department has warned that most of India may suffer from above normal day-time and night-time temperatures along with heatwaves in the summer season of April-May-June.

—Downtoearth

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR سالار

India can handle climate shocks in wheat crop

India is the second largest wheat producing country in the world
PHOTO: PIXABAY

Conducive weather conditions in both India and Pakistan are helping them to achieve record wheat output this year, but India is better prepared than the neighbour to handle climate change impact as it has developed many indigenous heat-resistant and short-duration seed varieties, according to agri-scientists.

India is the second and Pakistan is the eighth largest wheat-producing country in the world. While India is self-sufficient in wheat output, the latter imports 2-3 million tonnes.

One of the reasons behind Pakistan still being dependent on imports to meet domestic requirements is its failure to develop indigenous varieties of climate-resilient seeds.

Presently, the harvesting of wheat crops is underway in both countries. India has projected wheat output to touch a new record of 114 million tonnes in the 2023-24 crop year (July-June), while Pakistan has set an ambitious target of 32.2 million tonnes from an area of 8.9 million hectares.

While the two countries have been facing the adverse impact of climate change on wheat crop since 2010 onwards, the current year has been exceptionally favourable as there have been no events of terminal heat waves nor unseasonal rains affecting the crop.

Out of 600 indigenous wheat varieties released so far in India, Singh said as many as over 100 climate-resilient varieties are in the seed chain now. Around 14 new varieties were released in the current year itself.

According to Naresh Kumar, Principal Investigator at ICAR's National Innovations in Climate Resilient Agriculture (NICRA), India is doing much better when compared to other countries in taking various agronomic measures such as changing planting dates and short-duration varieties besides promoting raised bed cultivation, sprinkler irrigation, and soil-water-nitrogen management.

Wheat crop is highly sensitive to temperature increases. Hot and unseasonal warm weather cut India's wheat output in 2022 and 2023, leading to a drawdown in state reserves.

It is reported a 5.5 per cent decrease in wheat yield during the past 30 years (1980-2010) occurred due to a decadal temperature increase of 0.13 degree Celsius.

With further predicted rise in temperatures, many studies have reported a decline in wheat production in the world.

Rajbir Yadav, wheat breeder and Principal Scientist at Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), said the climate-smart seed varieties that India has developed can be easily grown in Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

"It can fit well in some areas as agro-climatic conditions are the same," he said. The situation of wheat farmers in Pakistan is different despite sharing similar agro-climatic conditions for growing wheat.

Since 2021, Pakistan's agriculture department has released as many as 31 wheat varieties through international collaborations to help cultivated fields become more productive, climate-resilient and disease-resistant.

While Pakistan Agriculture Research Council (PARC) has acquired over 4,000 wheat germplasm varieties from various international sources for evaluation and utilization in national breeding programmes, it has yet to indigenously produce quality seeds and species with the ability to absorb climate shocks.

Punjab's Minister for Agriculture Syed Ashiq Hussain Shah ruled out any climate impact on wheat crop. "We are expecting a bumper crop this year."

—PTI

India has projected wheat output to touch a new record of 114 million tonnes ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Only 57 producers are responsible for 80% of all emissions: Report

Quantifying fossil fuel and cement production, and associated emissions, is a crucial step ***PHOTO: PIXABAY***

Just 57 companies and nation states were responsible for generating 80 per cent of the world's CO_2 emissions from fossil fuels and cement over the last seven years, according to a new report released by the think-tank InfluenceMap. This finding suggests that net zero targets set by the Paris climate change agreement in 2015 are yet to make a significant impact on fossil fuel production.

The report uses the Carbon Majors database, established in 2013 by Richard Heede of the Climate Accountability Institute, to provide fossil fuel production data from 122 of the world's largest oil, gas, coal and cement producers.

InfluenceMap report tells a sobering but informative story of the state of production in these high-emitting industries. Cement and fossil fuel production has reached unprecedented levels, with most of the emission growth traceable to a relatively small number of large companies.

The troubling reality is that the lack of progress of these large fossil fuel companies means the world will need to undertake ever more stringent and steep decarbonisation trajectories if countries are to meet the Paris agreement goal of keeping warming well below 2 degrees Celsius.

Carbon Majors database highlights how critical it is for companies and countries to be held accountable for their lack of progress on emission reductions. Companies need to define exactly how best to align with the Paris goals, and then monitor and track their progress.

To address this need, our team of researchers from the Universities of Queensland, Oxford and Princeton developed a framework that outlines strict science-based requirements for tracking the progress of companies against Paris-aligned pathways.

By applying this framework to the Carbon Majors database in a follow-up study, our team mapped production budgets for 142 fossil fuel companies against several Paris-aligned global scenarios of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

We considered the "middle-of-the-road" future scenario whereby business carries on as usual – this is commonly used by investors to evaluate a company's climate risks. With this scenario, we found that between 2014 and 2020, the coal, oil and gas companies produced 64%, 63% and 70% respectively more than their budgets allow. Further details can be found on the Are You Paris Compliant? website.

Transparency is crucial

Over the seven-year period covered by the InfluenceMap report, nation states and state-owned companies are responsible for most of this growth. It is not yet clear whether such government-run companies will move towards improved reporting against climate standards, but further interventions by governments will clearly be required to meet stated national emission-reduction goals.

Fortunately, more transparency will be available for investor-owned companies. In 2023, a non-profit that aims to standardise global accounting, the International Financial Reporting Standards Foundation, released new climate-related disclosure standards. These should provide investors, politicians and the public with access to more transparent and consistent data, making it much easier for them to accurately judge companies' climate performance – or lack thereof.

It will be interesting to read the climate reporting of the 57 companies identified by InfluenceMap in coming years. The release of the Carbon Majors data, along with the new climate-related disclosure standards, will hopefully make a huge difference. Companies being more accountable for their emissions should help reduce greenwashing in corporate sustainability reports.

Quantifying fossil fuel and cement production, and associated emissions, is a crucial step. But companies also need to act. Achieving net zero by reducing the emissions of a relatively small number of companies will be much easier than persuading 8 billion people to take collective action on climate.

Such drastic reductions in fossil fuel production must also be matched by investment in abundant and increasingly cheap sources of clean renewable energy. Without these steps, the Paris goals will be unachievable – and that's very risky for all of us.

—The Conversation

Russia-friendly populist elected Slovakia President

MOSCOW, 7 APRIL

Populist Peter Pellegrini has been elected president of Slovakia, succeeding the liberal Zuzana Caputova. Pellegrini, 48, defeated the pro-Western Ivan Korcok, a former diplomat, with 53% of the vote. A former prime minister, he is an ally of Prime Minister Robert Fico, and shares the PM's dovish attitude towards Russia. Fico and his allies now control Slovakia's parliament, government and soon the president's office. Slovakia had been one of Ukraine's staunchest allies before Fico came to power in October on a pledge to halt supplies of Slovak Army military stocks to Kyiv. With Pellegrini replacing Caputova, Ukraine has now definitively lost a voice of support in an EU and Nato capital. Fico has called for an end to Western military support for Ukraine. *—BBC News*

Taiwan quake: Daily aftershocks drop to 89 from 314

TAIPEI, 7 APRIL

The number of daily aftershocks after a powerful 7.4 earthquake rocked Huwalien City on April 3 has shown a declining trend, reported Central News Agency Focus Taiwan, citing the Central Weather Administration's (CWA) statement on Sunday. Data showed a decline in the daily count of aftershocks over the past few days, dropping from 314, 167, and 111 to 89. As of 8.12 am Sunday, a total of 681 aftershocks had hit Taiwan, including two exceeding a magnitude of 6, one of magnitude 6.5, and another 6.2 that struck at 8.11 am and 10:14 am on 3 and 24 April, ranging from magnitude 5 to 6, CWA data showed, as per Focus Taiwan. During the recent timeframe, a total of 208 earthquakes with magnitudes ranging from 4 to 5 were recorded. *—ANI*

Taiwan tracks 6 Chinese vessels around country

TAIPEI, 7 APRIL

Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence (MND) said it tracked six Chinese naval vessels operating around country from 6 am (local time) on Saturday to 6 am (local time) on Sunday. According to Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence, Taiwanese armed forces have monitored the situation and deployed naval vessels and coastal systems in response to China's activities. During that time, there were no Chinese military aircraft detected crossing the median line of the Taiwan Strait or entering Taiwan's southwestern Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). In a statement, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence stated, "6 PLAN vessels operating around Taiwan were detected up until 6 a.m. (UTC+8) today. ROC Armed Forces have monitored the situation and employed Navy vessels and coastal missile systems in response to the detected activities." *—ANI*

PHOTO: X/@gflbirmingham

Actor Cole Brings found dead in Kansas

WASHINGTON, 7 APRIL

A US actor has been found dead after being named as a suspect in a domestic violence investigation. Cole Brings Plenty, who appeared in the Yellowstone spinoff series, 1923, was found in Kansas. He was reported missing by his family earlier this week after he missed an appointment with his agent. The 27-year-old's body was discovered on Friday after local police were dispatched to examine an unoccupied vehicle. The sheriff's office in Johnson County announced the news in a statement shared on social media and said an investigation was ongoing. *—BBC NEWS*

6 months on, peace is a dream in Gaza war

At least 33,000 Gazans, a majority of whom were civilians, have been killed

GAZA, 7 APRIL

Six months after the Hamas attacks on Israel, war, disease, starvation and death ravage Palestinians in Gaza. Israel is deeply divided, as its prime minister struggles to keep his promise of total victory. The United States, Israel's most essential ally, has turned against the way it is fighting the war.

With Iran vowing vengeance for Israel's assassination of a leading Iranian general in Syria, and months of cross-border conflict with Iran's ally Hezbollah in Lebanon, the risks of an all-out Middle East war are increasing.

The statistics record the horrors of the past six months. More than 33,000 Gazans, a majority of whom were civilians, have been killed, according to the health ministry. According to Save the Children, 13,800 Palestinian children in Gaza have been killed and over 12,009 wounded. Unicef reports at least 1,000 children have had one or both legs amputated.

More than 1,200 Israelis, mostly civilians, were killed by Hamas on 7 October, and 253 people were taken into Gaza as hostages. Israel says that of 130 hostages still there, at least 34 are dead. A UN team reported in March that it had "clear and convincing information" that hostages had been subjected to sexual violence "including rape, sexualised torture, cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment". It said there were "reasonable grounds" to believe that the violence against hostages was continuing.

Kibbutz Nir Oz is right on Israel's border with Gaza. It feels like a time capsule still stuck in the horrors of 7 October 2023. Just after first light on that morning, Hamas broke through the wire. By the time the Israeli army arrived in the early afternoon, a quarter of the 400 or so Israelis who lived there had either been killed by Hamas or taken hostage.

Ron Bahat showed me around. He is a man in his 50s who grew up at Nir Oz. Ron survived with his family through good luck and arms strong enough to hold shut the door of the safe room when Hamas entered his house. *—BBC News*

People take part in a protest against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and call for the release of hostages held in the Gaza Strip by the Hamas militant group in Tel Aviv, Israel **PHOTO: PTI**

UK sends naval ship, announces support for Gaza

LONDON, 7 APRIL

David Cameron **PHOTO: ANI**

- The UK government also said that they are committed to provide aid deliveries worth up to £9.7 million

Amid the ongoing war between Israel and Hamas, the UK government announced military and civilian support to set up a maritime aid corridor to Gaza, including the deployment of a navy ship to join the lifesaving mission in the Eastern Mediterranean.

UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron has called the situation in Gaza "dire" and the prospect of famine "real".

He said that UK remains committed to getting aid to those who desperately need it.

In a press release, the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office said, "The UK Government is today announcing a package of military and civilian support to set up a maritime aid corridor to Gaza, including the deployment of a Royal Navy ship to join the life-saving mission in the Eastern Mediterranean."

"The ship, alongside new UK aid and British expertise, will support the establishment of an international humanitarian maritime corridor from Cyprus to Gaza, supported by many of our partner governments and the UN, and is expected to be operational in early May," it added. *—ANI*

Some party leaders in touch with establishment: Imran

ISLAMABAD, 7 APRIL

Pakistan's jailed former prime minister Imran Khan has said that some of his party leaders are in contact with the powerful establishment, as he expressed willingness to hold a dialogue with anyone amidst the crackdown on his party.

Khan's remarks came as he spoke to reporters after the hearing of the Al-Qadir Trust corruption case on Saturday, the Dawn newspaper said.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder said if he could hold talks with former army chief Qamar Javed Bajwa, who he later accused of being instrumental in the fall of his government in April 2022, then he could meet anyone since the country was passing through a difficult phase. Khan said that a few leaders in the PTI "are still in contact with the establishment", apparently for negotiations. However, he did not elaborate. He also claimed that the mandate of the PTI had been stolen and "efforts were being made to take over the party". Since falling out with the powerful military, Khan's party has been facing a crackdown. The party faced pressure in the form of arrests and dese¬rtions in the wake of the 9 May viol¬ence that broke out after Khan's arrest last year. Khan had turned on former Gen Bajwa around the time of his ouster and claimed that the latter was involved in a US-backed conspiracy to remove him from office. *—PTI*

Imran Khan **PHOTO: PTI**

Thousands protest against Hungarian Prime Minister

BUDAPEST, 7 APRIL

Tens of thousands of people protested against Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban's administration in downtown Budapest on Saturday, according to Al Jazeera.

Peter Magyar, 43, a former government insider turned critic who was formerly married to Judit Varga, Orban's former justice minister, spearheaded the demonstration on Saturday.

Aiming to bring together conservative and liberal Hungarians disenchanted with Orban's leadership and the dispersed, ineffective political opposition, Magyar spoke to an assemblage of people crammed into the expansive square outside the parliament building in Budapest.

"Step by step, brick by brick, we are taking back our homeland and building a new country, a sovereign, modern, European Hungary," he said.

As the demonstrators marched in the direction of parliament, some protestors yelled, "Orban resign!" and "We are not scared!" reported Al Jazeera.

Many hoisted the national flag or donned the red, white, and green national colours, which Orban's party has claimed as its own for the last 20 years.

When Magyar became the government's whistleblower in February and made controversial remarks regarding the inner workings of Orban's administration, he gained widespread recognition. In the recording, she described how aides to Antal Rogan, Orban's cabinet chief, attempted to tamper with the prosecution files in a corruption case involving Pal Volner, the former state secretary of the ministry of justice. *—ANI*

Hungarian lawyer and ex- government insider join the protest **PHOTO: AFP**

MEXICO PREZ PALACE GETS 19 FERAL CATS

MEXICO CITY, 7 APRIL

Nineteen feral cats have free rein of Mexico's National Palace, long roaming the lush gardens and historic colonial halls of the most iconic buildings in the country.

"They have access to every part of the palace, so they walk in on meetings, interviews and wander onto camera," said Jesús Arias, the palace veterinarian, as a handful of feline friends brush against his ankles. Now, the palace cats have made hiss-tory after the government of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador declared them to be "living fixed assets," the first animals in Mexico to receive the title.

The investment term "fixed assets" usually applies to buildings and furniture, but by applying it to cats, López Obrador's government has obligated the country's Treasury to give them food and care for them for the rest of their lives, even after the leader leaves office. "The cats are now a symbol. I wouldn't understand the National Palace without the presence of these cats," said Adriana Castillo Román, general director of the National Palace. Nestled in the heart of Mexico City, the presidential palace has long been the seat of Mexico's executive branch. *—AP*

2 SEPARATE INCIDENTS

12 militants, 6 army officers killed in Pak terror attacks

Representative picture **PHOTO: X/@LOCWORLD123**

ISLAMABAD, 7 APRIL

- In another attack the same night, Constable Sanamat Khan was killed when unknown assailants opened fire on him. The cop was stationed in Miramshah town ofand he had returned to the village on leave

Six security personnel, including a senior police officer, died while 12 militants were killed in separate terror incidents and security operations in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces in the past two days, officials said on Sunday.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), the media wing of the Pakistan armed forces, said in the Balochistan province, four militants were killed in two separate incidents. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), eight militants were killed in the Kot Sultan area of Kulachi tehsil in Dera Ismail Khan district when security forces carried out an operation against them, the ISPR said.

The security forces recovered weapons, ammunition and explosives from the slain militants, it added. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Lakki Marwat, a DSP and two cops were killed and a constable was injured by armed miscreants in two separate incidents on Friday night, officials said.

The officials said DSP Gul Muhammad, along with other policemen, had set up a temporary checkpoint on the busy Peshawar-Karachi highway as part of police's security preparations before the festival of Eid-ul-Fitr. As they were returning from the checkpoint, armed men opened fire on the police van near Manjiwala Chowk, leaving the DSP and Constable Naseem Gul dead, the report said.

In another attack the same night, Constable Sanamat Khan was killed when unknown assailants opened fire on him near his house in the Sra Darga area. The cop was stationed in Miramshah town of North Waziristan district, and he had returned to the village on leave, the Dawn reported.

Moreover, a police official was killed and another injured when a remote-controlled improvised explosive device went off in Mamund tehsil of Bajaur district on Saturday, according to the report.

A head constable of the Counter Terrorism Department (CTD) was killed by unknown people near the Mian Lal police post in the Tank district on Saturday night. *—PTI*

PAKISTAN SET TO REPAY $1 BILLION AGAINST EUROBOND

ISLAMABAD, 7 APRIL

Pakistan is set to repay a foreign debt worth $1 billion against a 10-year Eurobond maturing in the middle of this month which will reduce the stock of the debt acquired through the selling of bonds in international markets to below $7 billion.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) told The Express Tribune that it was ready to repay the bond anytime and was waiting to receive instructions to do so from the finance ministry. The move will reduce the stock of the debt acquired through selling Eurobonds and Sukuks (bond-like instruments used in Islamic finance) in international markets to below $7 billion.

This has enhanced the country's capacity to repay all the upcoming maturing foreign debt on time.

Following the repayment of $1 billion in April, Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves will experience a decline. However, the anticipated International Monetary Fund (IMF) tranche of $1.1 billion, likely to be received by the end of April, is expected to restore the reserves back to over the $ 8 billion mark.

Topline Securities CEO Muhammad Sohail said the recent increases in inflows from foreign portfolio investors purchasing shares at the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) and treasury bills, coupled with the SBP's gradual acquisition of US dollars from the market, were contributing to the management of regular debt repayments. *—PTI*

State Bank of Pakistan said it was ready to repay bond **PHOTO: PTI**

'MONSTER' HUSBAND

UK man cut wife's body into 200 pieces

WASHINGTON, 7 APRIL

A "controlling" husband allegedly killed his wife and then chopped up her body, keeping the remains in their flat for a week.

He then ditched her body parts in plastic bags in a river. Nicholas Metson, 28, joked to police that Holly Bramley "might be hiding under the bed" when officers were looking for her, a judge was told. Eight days after she was seen, the 26-year-old's remains were found,

The Daily Mail exclusively reports. The court heard how Metson had a history of being nasty to animals, and he had previously punished his wife by murdering their pets in grotesque ways.

The duo were about to separate after sixteen months of marriage when Metson repeatedly knifed her at their flat. Afterwards, he looked online to unpack 'What benefits do I get if my wife has died' and 'can someone haunt me after they die'.

In 2016, Metson was also granted a community order for three offences of disclosing sexual images about a previous partner.

On 24 March, Lincolnshire Police received a call expressing worry for Bramley's safety. But Metson answered the door and said he had been the victim of a domestic assault from Bramley the previous weekend.

He showed officers a bite mark, which the judge said was most likely have been inflicted in self-defence by the woman before she was murdered. Aspden noted blood-stained sheets in the bath and on the kitchen floor, and realised that the flat had a strong smell of bleach.

On March 25 at 6pm, a member of the public noticed some plastic bags in the River Witham at Bassingham, which is a village ten miles away. *—Mirror*

Nicholas Metson and Holly Bramley were about to separate after 16 months of marriage when Metson repeatedly knifed her **PHOTO: LINCOLNSHIRE POLICE**

Greta Thunberg detained twice in Netherlands

THE HAGUE, 7 APRIL

- Soon after being freed, Thunberg went back to join a small group of protesters obstructing another road that led to the train station

Climate activist Greta Thunberg was detained twice by the police during a demonstration in the Netherlands after she protested against fossil fuel subsidies by blocking a major road with a group of marchers on Saturday, Al Jazeera reported.

Over 400 people were detained on Saturday, according to the police, including 12 for incitement. Activists said Thunberg was freed later. Along with other protesters who attempted to obstruct a key highway leading to The Hague, the 21-year-old Swedish activist was first taken into custody by local police and held for a short time. Soon after being freed, Thunberg went back to join a small group of protesters obstructing another road that led to the train station. She was detained a second time there and taken away in a police van.

Marching from the heart of The Hague to the nearby A12 arterial highway, which connects the Dutch government's seat with Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Utrecht, were hundreds more protesters. *—ANI*

‘Incredible India’: UNGA Prez lauds digitalisation

His interactions with government focused on sustainability

UNITED NATIONS, 7 APRIL

UN General Assembly President Dennis Francis has lauded India’s use of digitalisation that has helped achieve financial inclusion and poverty reduction, underlining that this gives the country a “comparative advantage” and its lessons can be shared with the global community.

“Let me say first of all that since I’ve been to India, every time I think of India, I think ‘Incredible India’. And I mean this in all earnest, and I saw it when I was there. The specific example to which I can refer is India’s use of digitalisation,” Francis, President of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly, said in an exclusive interview.

He referred to the country’s tourism tagline of ‘Incredible India.’

During the visit, his interactions with government officials, civil society members and think tanks focused on issues such as sustainability, multilateralism, accessibility, and digital public infrastructure.

UN General Assembly President Dennis Francis PHOTO: AFP

He also lauded India’s use of digitalisation to alleviate poverty and bring millions of people into the formal economic system “simply through the use of a handset and a digitalisation model.”

He underscored that digitalisation is important because it is “productive, it drives cost down, makes economies more efficient, makes things cheaper.”

He cited the example of digitalisation helping Indian women, and farmers across the length and breadth of the country and in far-flung places to negotiate their prices, deal with banks and make payments without having to leave their homes, farmlands or areas.

Last year, India’s Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Ruchira Kamboj highlighted at the world body the impact of financial inclusion on the social and economic empowerment of people in India.

- UN General Assembly President Dennis Francis has lauded India’s use of digitalisation that has helped achieve financial inclusion and poverty reduction, underlining that this gives the country a “comparative advantage” and its lessons can be shared with the global community

She had noted that in 2009, only 17 per cent of adults in India had bank accounts, 15 per cent used digital payments, one in 25 had a unique ID document, and about 37 per cent had mobile phones. As of 2022, over 600 crore digital payment transactions were completed per month. *—PTI*

Power Min warns of debt trap for borrowing money for free electricity

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Power Minister RK Singh has warned of a debt trap for states like Punjab using borrowed money to provide free electricity, saying such populist schemes are fine only if a state has finances.

Electricity, like any other commodity, involves the cost of generating it, and if a state is to provide it for free to a section of consumers, it also needs to have finances to pay the generating utility. If the generating utility isn’t paid, electricity will not be produced in the first place.

Asked to name states that do so, the bureaucrat-turned-politician said, “For example Punjab. Since coming to power in Punjab in 2022, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government has taken several populist measures, including free power up to 300 units per household.

Punjab borrowed as much as Rs 47,000 crore in the first two years of the AAP government, adding to the already high debt of the state. This has strained finances where a good part of the tax revenues earned went into paying interest and principal of the previous borrowing,” he said

Power Minister RK Singh PHOTO: PTI

- Power Minister RK Singh has warned of a debt trap for states like Punjab using borrowed money to provide free electricity, saying such populist schemes are fine only if a state has finances.

As a result, current dues are up to date, arrears have come down to Rs 40,000 crore from 1.45 lakh crore,” he added.

When asked about providing the consumer with the option of multiple service providers, the minister promised to get through the required amendments in the Electricity Act 2003.The minister introduced the Electricity (Amendment) Bill, 2022, for the purpose in the Lok Sabha on 8 August , 2022, which was sent to the standing committee for vetting on the same day. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Vistara to discuss rostering system with pilots: CEO

MUMBAI, 7 APRIL

After facing significant flight disruptions due to the non-availability of crew, Vistara chief Vinod Kannan said the airline will look to review the current rostering system after discussions with pilots and emphasised that there has been no unusual spike in attrition.

The Tata Group airline, which is in the process of getting merged with Air India, has temporarily reduced flight operations to ensure the availability of adequate pilot buffer and expects the situation to normalise by May. In an interview, Kannan said that during a town hall with pilots, some concerns were raised around rostering, and pilots were told that the airline would look at how the rostering process can be reviewed. Out of the airline’s total workforce of around 6,500 people, 1,000 are pilots. Vistara is jointly owned by Tatas and Singapore Airlines. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Goa tourism signs MoU with Ironman race organisers

PANAJI, 7 APRIL

Goa tourism department has announced a strategic partnership with IRONMAN 70.3 India race organisers Yoska with an aim to promote sports tourism in the region. An MoU for the purpose was signed by Goa Tourism director Suneel Anchipaka and IRONMAN 70.3 India deputy race director Neil D’silva at the recently concluded Goa International Travel Mart at Dona Paula in the coastal state, a release said on Sunday. Anchipaka said that through this partnership, the tourism department aims to position Goa as a premier destination for sports tourism, leveraging its natural beauty and vibrant energy to attract quality tourists from across the globe.

The 2024 race will be held in Goa on 27 October and will once again draw athletes to the state, it said.

Deepak Raj, the chief executive officer of Yoska and franchise owner and race director of the IRONMAN 70.3 in India said, “With the support of Goa Tourism, IRONMAN 70.3 India has found its home in Goa and has evolved into an endurance race for India’s and the world’s triathlon community.”. *—PTI*

Markets to track global events in few trading days

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Global trends, macroeconomic data announcements and the start of the earnings season would be the major drivers for the equity markets in a holiday-shortened week, analysts said.

Equity markets will remain closed on Thursday for Eid-Ul-Fitr.Trading activity of foreign investors, rupee-dollar trends and crude oil prices would also guide trends in markets.Indian companies are set to enter a new corporate earnings Q4 season this week. Leading the pack is IT services giant TCS, set to kick off the earnings season for the quarter ending March 2024.

Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 596.87 or 0.81 per cent. It hit an all-time high of 74,501.73 on 4 April.

PHOTO: PTI

This week, the focus will shift to Q4 earnings season as TCS will announce its results on 12th April. Also, markets will take cues from global events like India & US inflation data, and ECB policy meeting. Overall, we expect the market to consolidate in a broader range,” Siddhartha Khemka, from Motilal Oswal Financial Services said.*—PTI*

MOST AMBITIOUS PROJECT

Adani to invest ₹2.3 lakh cr in renewable energy and manufacturing capacity

KHAVDA, 7 APRIL

Adani Group will invest about Rs 2.3 lakh crore through 2030 in India’s most ambitious renewable energy expansion and solar and wind manufacturing capacity addition ever as it shrugs off a short-seller attack to pursue its trademark rapid growth plans.

Adani Green Energy Ltd, India’s largest renewable energy company, will invest about Rs 1.5 lakh crore in expanding capacity to generate electricity from solar energy and wind power at Khavda in Gujarat’s Kutch to 30 gigawatts from 2 GW currently and another Rs 50,000 crore in 6-7 GW of similar projects elsewhere in the country, a top company official said.

PHOTO: PTI

Adani New Industries Ltd (ANIL), a unit in the group’s flagship Adani Enterprises Ltd, will invest close to Rs 30,000 crore in expanding solar cell and wind turbine manufacturing capacity at Mundra in Gujarat. AGEL, which currently has an operating portfolio of 10,934 megawatts (10.93 GW), is targeting 45 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2030. 30 GW of this will come up at just one location at Khavda - the world’s largest renewable energy project. Now it is back to its breakneck speed expansion, switching back-to-back deals including one with Reliance Industries Ltd of rival billionaire Mukesh Ambani. *—PTI*

NTPC AIMS FOR 40 MMT COAL PRODUCTION IN FY25

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

State-owned power giant NTPC, on Sunday, said it has set a 40 million metric tonnes (MMT) coal production target from its captive mines for 2024-25. The target will help NTPC achieve a 17 per cent y-o-y growth in captive coal production, the company statement said.

The company has achieved a coal despatch of 34.15 MMT, and the production stood at 34.38 MMT at the end of March 31, 2024.

To achieve sustained growth in coal production, NTPC has implemented a range of strategies and technologies.

These include adoption of safety measures, improved mine planning, equipment automation, workforce training, and implementation of continuous monitoring and analysis systems.

Coal import rises 13 pc in February

India’s coal import rose by 13 per cent to 21.64 million tonnes (MT) in February as some buyers took fresh positions to replenish stocks ahead of summer, according to online marketplace mjunction. The country’s coal import was 19.15 MT in the corresponding month of FY23.

Of the total import in February, non-coking coal import increased to 13.77 MT compared to 11.68 MT imported in the year-ago period.

“Coking coal volume was 4.56 MT, against 4.40 MT imported in February 2023,” it said.The country’s coal import also went up to 244.27 MT in the April-February period of FY24 over 227.93 MT in the year-ago period, the online marketplace said. *—PTI*

HDFC AMONGST BIG GAINERS

4 top valued firms add ₹1.71 lakh cr to mcap

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Four of the top 10 valued firms added Rs 1,71,309.28 crore to their market valuation last week with HDFC Bank and Life Insurance Corporation of India (LIC) emerging as the biggest gainers in line with an overall positive trend in equities.

On the other hand, six companies from the top 10 pack took a Rs 78,127.48 crore hit to their market valuation with index major Reliance Industries accounting for the majority of the losses. Last week, the BSE benchmark climbed 596.87 or 0.81 per cent. It hit an all-time high of 74,501.73 on 4 April.

Six companies from the top 10 pack took a Rs 78,127.48 crore hit to their market valuation with index major Reliance Industries PHOTO: PTI

While Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), HDFC Bank, State Bank of India and LIC were the gainers from the top 10 pack, Reliance Industries, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Infosys, ITC and Hindustan Unilever faced losses in their valuation. The market valuation of HDFC Bank jumped Rs 76,880.74 crore to reach Rs 11,77,065.34 crore. LIC added Rs 49,208.48 crore, taking its valuation to Rs 6,27,692.77 crore.

The mcap of Hindustan Unilever went lower by Rs 129.23 crore to Rs 5,32,816.81 crore. Reliance Industries remained the most valued domestic firm by market valuation followed by TCS, HDFC Bank, ICICI Bank, State Bank of India, Bharti Airtel, LIC, Infosys, ITC and Hindustan Unilever. *—PTI*

Voltas AC crosses 2M unit sales mark in FY24

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Leading residential air conditioner maker Voltas on Sunday said it has recorded a 35 per cent sales growth to over two million units in FY24, becoming the first company in the domestic market to cross this mark.

The performance was attributed to a consistent demand for cooling products during the year, coupled with a strong offline and online distribution network, and new innovative launches, the Tata Group firm said in a statement.

With these landmark sales, Voltas is “the first ever brand to achieve this extraordinary milestone in the Air Conditioning industry in India”, it said.Indian residential AC market is estimated to be around 10 million units in FY24 and is expected to grow to 11.5 million units this year. Besides, its home appliances brand Voltas Beko, a JV with Turkish appliances maker Arcelik, also achieved the milestone of selling close to 2 million units in FY24. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

FPIs withdraw ₹325 cr from Indian equities in April

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

FPIs have turned cautious as they pulled out Rs 325 crore from Indian equities in the first week of this month owing to relatively high valuations and the upcoming general elections.

The net outflow came after a staggering investment of Rs 35,000 crore in March and Rs 1,539 crore in February, data with the depositories showed.

On the other hand, FPIs have made a net investment of Rs 1,215 crore in the debt market during the period under review.

Indian government securities (G-Sec) 10-year yield standing at 7.1 per cent and the US 10-year at 4.3 per cent present a compelling case for FPIs. The risk-reward ratio is prompting them to shift their focus from equities to the higher yields offered by bond instruments in the US and India.

This inflow is expected to make Indian bonds more accessible to foreign investors and potentially strengthen the rupee, thereby, bolstering the economy.

Overall, the total inflow for this year so far stood at more than Rs 10,500 crore in equities and over Rs 57,000 crore in the debt market.

PHOTO: PTI

FIIs, FPIs inflow likely to stay strong in FY25

With markets at all-time high, the foreign institutional investors (FIIs) and foreign portfolio investments (FPIs) are pouring money in the Indian market. On the back of robust economic growth and great momentum in earnings growth FIIs, FPIs and DIIs investment is likely to stay strong in FY25.

Indian stock market witnessed a historic surge in investment during FY24, setting a new milestone in the realm of foreign investment. The Central Depository Services Limited (CDSL) data suggests, foreign investors brought in a staggering amount of over Rs 3,39,064 crore in India’s stock market in FY24, the highest-ever investment so far.

While on the other note the country has witnessed a significant decline in the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) during the period from April 2023 to December 2023. *—ANI*

BLACKROCK, ADIA, MUTUAL FUNDS HIKE STAKE IN VEDANTA

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

The world’s largest asset manager BlackRock, as well as the Abu Dhabi Investment Authority, along with domestic mutual funds like ICICI Mutual Fund and Nippon India Mutual Fund have increased their holdings in Vedanta by almost 2 per cent during the last four months, said market participants.

At the same time, foreign institutional investors (FIIs) increased their stake in the conglomerate by 1.2 per cent during the corresponding period, they added.

The recent rally in Vedanta share price on the back of demerger plans, deleveraging and soaring metal prices has led to a bullish call by domestic and international funds.

For every share of Vedanta, shareholders will receive one share of each of the five newly listed companies.

After the demerger, the businesses of Hindustan Zinc as well as the electronics business will remain with Vedanta Limited. *—PTI*

SUNRISE SECTOR

Food processing industry poised to reach $535 billion by 2026

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Anita Praveen, secretary of Ministry of Food Processing, emphasised the pivotal role of research and development (R&D) in propelling the Indian food processing sector to greater heights.

Speaking at FICCI Scientific Symposium on ‘Processed Foods for Purpose’, Praveen highlighted the sector’s significant potential for growth and its status as a priority area within India’s agricultural landscape.

Praveen stated, “The Indian agriculture sector is witnessing a robust growth with record levels of production and Food Processing sector has become one of the priority sectors for growth.”The Secretary outlined the strategic advantages of the food processing industry, citing abundant availability of raw materials at competitive prices and burgeoning consumer demand both domestically and internationally.She stressed the importance of direct engagement between industry players, farmers, and micro-level processing units to enhance efficiency and minimise wastage.To boost exports, Praveen advocated for closer collaboration between large industries and smaller units, emphasizing the importance of quality control and maintaining robust supply chains.

Food Processing sector is considered as a sunrise sector and has achieved notable progress in terms of modernisation PHOTO: PTI

- Anita Praveen, secretary of Ministry of Food Processing, emphasised the pivotal role of research and development (R&D) in propelling the Indian food processing sector to greater heights.

Sanjay Khajuria, president of CIFTI-FICCI and director, Corporate Affairs at Nestle India Ltd, hailed food processing as a ‘sunrise sector’, lauding its progress in modernisation and sustainable economic growth.“Food Processing sector is considered as a sunrise sector and has achieved notable progress in terms of modernisation and sustainable economic growth in recent years,” he said.With projections indicating an upward trend, India’s food processing sector’s output is expected to soar more than USD 600 billion by the fiscal year 2025-26. *—ANI*

MI beats DC with 29 runs, ends losing streak in IPL 2024

Romario Shepherd's late fireworks help Mumbai Indians to a huge 234/5

MUMBAI, 7 APRIL

Romario Shepherd's 10-ball 39 not out outmuscled Tristan Stubb's courageous 71 off 25 balls as Mumbai Indians ended its three-match losing streak in the Indian Premier League with a 29–run win against Delhi Capitals on Sunday.

Conceding as many as 51 runs in the last two overs proved catastrophic for Delhi Capitals, whose bowlers remained wayward and batters lacked the spunk in the initial overs to go after MI bowlers, even though Stubbs went ballistic to make 25-ball 71 not out.

While Mumbai Indians managed to open their account in the points table after three losses upfront, the win also helped them leapfrog both Royal Challengers Bengaluru and Delhi Capitals to jump to the seventh spot while also improving their NRR to -0.704.

Delhi's lower order too cut a sorry figure with Axar Patel (8), Lalit Yadav (3), debutant Kumar Kushagra (0) and Jhye Richardson (2) falling in quick succession giving Gerald Coetzee, four wicket hauls.

Shepherd was last to join the party but seemed to have made the most of it, after each of Rohit Sharma (49 off 27 balls), Ishan Kishan (42 off 23 balls), Hardik Pandya (39 off 30) and Tim David (45 not out off 21 balls, 2 fours, 4 sixes) also made merry in batting-friendly conditions at the Wankhede Stadium. Mumbai's cause in general was also aided by wayward Delhi bowlers through the course of the innings, who kept feeding them balls in the zone to hit or those with enough width off which the batters could take their chances. *—PTI*

Mumbai Indians' Jasprit Bumrah celebrates a wicket during the match against Delhi Capitals in the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2024, at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday **PHOTOS: ANI**

Zaka Ashraf defends removal of Azam as skipper

LAHORE, 7 APRIL

Former Pakistan Cricket Board chief Zaka Ashraf has defended his decision to remove Babar Azam as captain following the team's disappointing ODI World Cup campaign in India. Zaka also denied claims from Pakistan's former captain, Shahid Afridi, that he had advised him to appoint Muhammad Rizwan as white-ball captain and not Shaheen Shah Afridi, who is his son-in-law. Babar was recently re-appointed as white-ball skipper, while Shaheen got the axe after just one series as the leader of the side. Shahid has claimed several times on television and in interviews that he never wanted Shaheen to take up the captaincy and, in fact, had suggested to Zaka to make Rizwan the white-ball captain. *—PTI*

PGA Tour: Bhatia one round away from Augusta berth

SAN ANTONIO, 7 APRIL

Akshay Bhatia stayed on course for a last-minute Masters berth and a second PGA TOUR title as he took a four-shot lead after 54 holes at the Valero Texas Open. Bhatia birdied his last two holes at the TPC San Antonio for a 4-under 68, taking a four-shot lead over Denny McCarthy into the final round as he tries to get the last spot in the Masters. Bhatia was at 15-under 201. With a message "Race My Race," Bhatia who had worked with a psychologist, has been working extra hard on the mental game. A victory would give Bhatia the final spot in the Masters, set aside in case the Valero Texas Open winner is not already exempt. He also would be exempt from the US Open with his second victory since last June. Bhatia won the Barracuda Championship last summer. *—ANI*

Tvesa Malik T-16 in South Africa, Ridhima is T-30

KEMPTON PARK, 7 APRIL

Talented golfer Tvesa Malik finished T-16 while fellow Indian Ridhima Dilawari was T-30 at the Absa Ladies Invitational on the Sunshine Ladies Tour. Tvesa shot 72-72-74 for 2-over. She had three bogeys and a double between the fourth and the seventh, but e closed superbly with three birdies between 13th and 18th. She had begun the final day tied for the lead with fellow South African Kiera Floyd, but Alexander went out in 34 before a brilliant back nine saw her collect an eagle and two birdies to romp to victory. While Floyd struggled to a 77 on Saturday and finished 11 strokes behind, Alexander's closest challenger was Spaniard Harang Lee, who also shot a 66 to finish on eight-under-par. *—PTI*

India lose 2-4 against Australia in 2nd hockey Test

PERTH, 7 APRIL

Indian men's hockey team dished out a much-improved performance as compared to its previous game but it still lost 2-4 to Australia in the second Test of the five-match series on Sunday. After the 1-5 drubbing they received on Saturday, the Indians were able to play in equal terms against their formidable opponents in the first and second quarters of the match. In fact, India was 2-1 ahead at half time, but some sloppy defending in the third quarter cost them dearly as the hosts pumped in three goals to register their second straight win. Jeremy Hayward (6th and 34th minutes) converted two penalty corners, while Jacob Anderson (42nd) and Nathan Ephraums (45th) found the net from field efforts for Australia. *—PTI*

Kohli's work ethic matchless: Ex BCCI anti-corruption chief Neeraj Kumar

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Former BCCI anti-corruption unit chief Neeraj Kumar found superstar Virat Kohli's work ethic "matchless" during his tenure with the powerful cricket board.

The former top cop of Delhi worked with the BCCI between 2015 and 2018. His role in the BCCI ACU required him to regularly interact with the cricketers and he found most of them to be nice and approachable.

"Oh there were lots of them. One should be really proud of them. They all gave me a lot of respect. But two people who are not spoken much about are Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Ajinkya Rahane, outstanding people, thorough gentlemen," said Kumar during an exclusive interaction with PTI journalists at its headquarters here.

Asked if the cricketers resorted to foul language, he added: "yes a few of them are fond of using foul language (in Hindi) but I found out this is how they speak. But all of them gave me so much respect unlike members of BCCI. So, there are lots of things to cherish," said the 70-year-old.

Kumar, a celebrated IPS officer who served for 37 years, was in charge of Delhi Police when its Special Cell under his guidance arrested former India cricketer S Sreesanth and fellow Rajasthan Royals cricketers Ajit Chandila and Ankit Chavan on spot-fixing charges. *—PTI*

TODAY'S MATCH

CHENNAI SUPER KINGS vs KKR

Time: 7.30 pm

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Chidambaram Stadium, Chennai

CSK bank on home advantage against KKR

CHENNAI, 7 APRIL

Defending champions Chennai Super Kings would expect a lot more from their top-order as they aim to get their campaign back on track against a power-packed Kolkata Knight Riders in the IPL on Monday.

Back-to-back defeats would not create panic in the forever calm CSK dressing room but the management will be keen to fix the flaws going ahead.

Skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad and the highly rated Rachin Ravindra need to up their game to provide CSK the start they need in the powerplay. Gaikwad is striking at 118.91 while Ravindra will be itching to make an impact after not doing much in the previous two games.

CSK's leading run scorer has been Shivam Dube who has tallied 148 runs at an impressive strike rate of 160.86.

Pacers Mustafizur Rahman and Matheesha Pathirana missed the last game due to different reasons, exposing the chinks in CSK's bowling attack. If they remain unavailable for the KKR game, CSK will need to think out of the box to make up for their absence.

Thus, the onus will be upon Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande and Mukesh Choudhary, alongside spinners Moeen Ali, Ravindra Jadeja and Maheesh Theekshana. Given the unusual pitch behaviour at Chepauk so far, it could be another run-feast. *—PTI*

PHOTO: X@SPORTYBUZZ1

Japanese GP: Verstappen wins after crash delay

TOKYO, 7 APRIL

Max Verstappen cruised to a comfortable victory in the Japanese Grand Prix, leading team-mate Sergio Perez to a Red Bull one-two.

Verstappen took an early race stoppage at Suzuka as he secured his third victory in four races this season. Red Bull were in a league of their own in a race dominated by tyre strategy.Carlos Sainz passed team-mate Charles Leclerc late on to secure third as Ferrari used differing strategies.The race was red flagged on the first lap when RB's Daniel Ricciardo moved over on Alex Albon's Williams on the run between Turns Two and Three and the two touched and crashed at high speed. Verstappen had converted pole position into the lead at the first start and he did so again on the second, and took immediate control of the race on his way to his 13-point championship lead despite retiring from the last race in Australia. *—BBC News*

PHOTO: X/Formula 1

Athletic beat Mallorca to capture first Copa Del Rey trophy in 40 years

SEVILLE, 7 APRIL

After four decades and a half dozen finals that ended in defeat, Athletic Bilbao was able to lift a cathartic Copa del Rey trophy No. 24 after edging Mallorca 4-2 on penalties on Saturday.

The team from northern Spain was favored entering the final thanks to its up-tempo attack, but instead it had to grind out a win against the modest Mallorca to finally deliver for its long suffering fans. Athletic goalkeeper Julen Agirrezabala saved a penalty by Manuel Morlanes, while Mallorca's Nemanja Radonjic shot high. Raul García, Iker Muniain, Mikel Vesga, and Alejandro Berenguer — all substitutes — converted their spot kicks past Mallorca goalkeeper Dominik Greif.

Extra time in the final ended 1-1 after Dani Rodríguez gave Mallorca the lead in the 21st minute and Athletic's Oihan Sancet leveled in the 50th.

Muniain received the trophy from Spanish King Felipe VI before lifting it high for his team and fans to celebrate.

The club is expected to celebrate the trophy by parading the team on a barge in the river that runs through Bilbao, a victory tradition that it has not carried out in four decades. Canada forward Cyle Larin had an opportunity to double Mallorca's lead seconds after halftime, but Agirrezabala saved his effort on the break. Muriqi and Antonio Sánchez converted their kicks in the shootout for Mallorca. *—PTI*

Athletic Bilbao beat Mallorca on penalties to end 40-year trophy drought. **PHOTO: X@BenCharles2014**

Candidates: Praggu stops Gujrathi's applecart

TORONTO, 7 APRIL

Indian grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa came up with a spectacular game to down compatriot Vidit Gujrathi in the third round of the Candidates Chess tournament here.

It turned out to be a satisfying day for the only sibling to make to the Candidates ever as R Vaishali also scored her first victory in the event at the expense of Nurgyul Salimova of Bulgaria in what was also the lone decisive game in the Women's section. In the men's section, D Gukesh tried to make some headways but could not really dent the solid defences of Ian Nepomniachtchi of Russia, while Frenchman Firouza Alireza's extra pawn came to a naught against top seed Fabiano Caruana of United States.

In the women section, Koneru Humpy played out an easy draw with white against Zhongyi Tan, Tinjie Lei of China signed peace with Aleksandra Goryachkina of Russia, while the other Russian Kateryna Lagno split the point with Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine.

In the women's event, Zhongyi Tan with two points remained a half point clear of nearest rival Goryachkina with Humpy, Vaishali, Lagno on their toes with 1.5 points each *—PTI*

PHOTO: X@FIDE_CHESS

MATCH-FIXING CHARGES

'Sreesanth escaped due to vacuum of law'

NEW DELHI, 7 APRIL

Stakeholders have shown a distinct lack of seriousness in bringing a law against corruption in Indian sports, a reason why someone like tainted former pacer S Sreesanth got away despite strong evidence of spot-fixing against him in the 2013 IPL, former Delhi Police Commissioner Neeraj Kumar has said.

Kumar, a celebrated IPS officer who served for 37 years, was in charge of Delhi Police when its Special Cell under his guidance arrested Sreesanth and fellow Rajasthan Royals cricketers Ajit Chandila and Ankit Chavan on spot-fixing charges.

S Sreesanth **PHOTO: X@SPORTYVISHAL**

Delhi Police Commissioner Neeraj Kumar **PHOTO: PTI**

However, in 2019, the Supreme Court, despite ruling that there was evidence against the former India player, asked BCCI to reconsider the life ban on him.

The punishment was eventually reduced to a seven-year suspension that ended in September, 2020.

He was also associated with the Hansie Cronje match-fixing scandal in 2000 as part of CBI's investigating team. Kumar said the biggest roadblock in prosecuting corruption in sports is the absence of a law.

Prevention of Sporting Fraud Bill (2013), which was tabled in Lok Sabha in 2018, had a provision for five-year imprisonment and a fine of Rs 10 lakh for those found guilty of sporting fraud, including fixing.

The bill was drafted by Justice (retd) Mukul Mudgal and was seen as a game-changer to curb match-fixing.

It was to replace the 'Public Gambling Act of 1867', under which anyone indulging in betting could be fined only Rs 200 or handed three months in prison.

Sreesanth is back in the mainstream and even played Ranji Trophy for Kerala before retiring from first-class cricket. He is now seen in various Legends' Leagues and also gives expert opinion on various broadcast forums. *—PTI*

ISL: BFC to lock horns with EB in battle for top 6 berth

KOLKATA, 7 APRIL

Bengaluru FC will lock horns with East Bengal FC at Salt Lake Stadium in Indian Super League (ISL) 2023-24 on Sunday.

The Blues and the Red & Gold Brigade are ranked eighth and ninth in the points table respectively.

Bengaluru FC has 22 points from 20 games (with five wins, seven draws and eight losses), whereas East Bengal FC has 21 of them from the same number of matches, with five wins, six draws and nine losses. They are breathing down the neck of the sixth-placed Chennaiyin FC (24), and the Marina Machans have also participated in 20 fixtures, as per a press release from ISL.

The Gerard Zaragoza-coached side had played out a goalless draw against Odisha FC in their previous game. East Bengal FC, on the other hand, beat Kerala Blasters FC by 4-2 in Kochi to storm back into contention to qualify for the playoffs.

This was only their second win in their last five games, whereas Bengaluru FC has been hovering around the top-six for a considerable period now. They will be playing the two Kolkata teams, i.e. East Bengal FC and Mohun Bagan Super Giant in their last two matches, and hence there is a formidable challenge fronting them to test their mettle of making it to the playoffs. *—ANI*